

# Tom Rickerling of 'Scutney



By  
Sophie Swett.



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THEY HAD BOTH BEEN OBLIGED TO WORK WITH  
MIGHT AND MAIN.

(See page 44.)



# TOM PICKERING

OF 'SCUTNEY

His Experiences and Perplexities

BY

SOPHIE SWETT

AUTHOR OF "THE PONKATY BRANCH ROAD," "FLYING HILL FARM,"  
"THE LOLLIPOPS' VACATION," "CAPTAIN POLLY," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED*

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TOM PICKERING OF 'SCUTNEY.





# TOM PICKERING OF 'SCUTNEY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MACURDY GREEN'S IDEA.

**M**ACURDY GREEN was trudging sturdily along the road to the village with a heavy basket on his arm, and thinking of what Captain Levi Hawkes had said to him just before he mounted the stage for Hebron,—

“The world is full of square boys in round holes, and round boys in square holes, just like you, Macurdy. A boy has got to fit himself to the hole, or stir 'round lively and find a hole that fits him; and he will if there's the right stuff in him.”

What Captain Levi said was worth thinking of; for he was captain of a ship, and knew the world. He had offered to take Macurdy with him on board his ship; but Macurdy knew what he wanted, and it wasn't that.

Farmer Bigsby had taken Macurdy from the poorhouse two years before, when he was a little more than twelve years old; and Farmer Bigsby,



who was "snug," admitted that Macurdy had always been "worth his keep."

But Macurdy wanted a better chance. He had decided that farming, at least after Farmer Bigsby's methods, would never suit him. He said to himself that he should not be afraid to leave 'Scutney Foreside and seek the place in life that would fit him or that he could fit, and he would go—if it were not for Jim! He looked wistfully across the fields at the 'Scutney poorhouse, standing dingy and dilapidated on the edge of a dreary little pond, as he thought of Jim. "He's walked over to the Corners to get 'em," he said to himself. "I hope he won't have to carry anything so heavy. Maybe somebody will give him a lift."

For Jim was not strong. The circus that had visited 'Scutney two years and a half before had left Jim behind it very ill with scarlet-fever; and he had been taken to the poorhouse, and had stayed there ever since. The fever had left him weak in mind as well as in body; there were people who thought he had always been what was known in 'Scutney as "underwitted." The town authorities had tried in vain to discover who he was or where he came from. The circus company had disclaimed all responsibility, declaring that he had run away from home to join it without the knowledge or consent of any of its members.

Macurdy Green had become Jim's friend and



protector. In fact, it was a part of Macurdy's theory of life that when a fellow was too weak to stand up for himself, it was his place to stand up for him. A place for himself must mean a place for Jim too. Macurdy was small of his age; and he had to wear Farmer Bigsby's old clothes, which Mrs. Bigsby thought it well to leave unaltered, both as a saving of labor and an encouragement to Macurdy to grow. This morning he had on a long-tailed coat that dangled around his heels, and he would have been completely extinguished under Farmer Bigsby's old hat if his ears had not been the largest part of him. But Macurdy had a strong and resolute chin; his nose was so sharp that it looked as if it had been whittled to a point, and his gray eyes were keen as well as honest. It was easy to see that there was more of Macurdy than could ever be swallowed up by Farmer Bigsby's old clothes or extinguished by his hat.

Macurdy began to whistle cheerily as he trudged along, his long-tailed coat flapping in the wind, and his great ears standing out from his head like sails set wing and wing. When a boy had thought things over until they began to look harder than they really were, Macurdy had found it a good plan to whistle.

"Where you going, 'Curdy?" called a voice.

Macurdy had reached Dr. Pickering's house,



and Tom Pickering was sitting on the woodpile whittling a basket out of a nutshell.

When he was younger, Tom had meant to be either a cowboy or a lion-tamer or an arctic explorer; but he had come to the conclusion that those occupations were too risky, and that there is nothing more satisfactory than the power that comes from wealth. He knew something about it; for his Uncle Rufus had given him twenty-five dollars, which he had put into the 'Scutney bank, and had also given him a "motto" bank, which now contained seventy-seven ten-cent pieces.

Uncle Rufus had gone away off to Texas and grown rich, and often sent home presents — always useful ones. Tom had hoped that he would send him some money this last Christmas, and was disappointed to have only a printing-press and a fountain-pen. He had used the press to print some cards for his twin sister Luella, but she had once been to New York on a visit and scorned Tom's cards because they were not engraved; and he had proposed to print some handbills for the man who kept the Boston store, but the man had wanted to see some specimens of Tom's work, and just because there were two or three words misspelled, and a few letters upside down, he wouldn't give him any orders.

And Tom, when he wrote to thank Uncle Rufus, said, "The Presints were verry hansom, but mon-



ney is an Orfle Handy Thing." Tom thought he had a head for business; but of what use was a head for business in 'Scutney? Nevertheless, he felt a little thrill of hope when he saw Macurdy coming. As old Uncle Sol Ramsdell at the poor-house said, "that there Macurdy Green has a headpiece of his own."

"Store," responded Macurdy concisely, in response to Tom's question; and he set his basket down to rest his arms.

"This town was a dull enough place before the January thaw," growled Tom. "Now there's no skating and no coasting, to say nothing of a job to give a fellow a start in life. What you got in your basket?"

"Stuff to turn at the store. There's some winter butter that I churned yesterday. And there's some stockings and mittens; we knit 'em — her and me." Macurdy nodded in the direction of the Bigsby farmhouse.

"I wouldn't stay where folks made me knit like a girl," said Tom contemptuously. "Halves?"

Macurdy shook his head sadly. "She isn't that kind, you know," he said. "But she let me knit a pair of mittens out of the middlin's for Jim."

"The poor-mistress ought to knit his mittens. He is nothing to you," said Tom. "If you want to help somebody, I wish you'd help me to get out



of this dead town, where there's no chance for a fellow."

"I'll tell you what this town needs." Macurdy sat down astride the chopping-block, so that his coat-tails extended along its whole length, and planted his feet firmly on the ground. "It's a good live newspaper."

Tom stared at him open-mouthed, and the expression of disgust deepened on his face. "I should like to know where it's going to get one, and what good 'twould do me, anyway," he said.

"You've got a printing-press, you know," said Macurdy. He didn't add that whether he was milking, feeding the cattle, shovelling snow, hauling wood, or knitting mittens, he had not been able to get that printing-press — a real press, with a large font of type — out of his mind since he first saw it. Macurdy always had his reserves.

The nutshell that Tom was whittling dropped from his hand.

"'Curdy, let's do it!" he exclaimed, jumping down from the woodpile.

"It'll take capital," said Macurdy; "and spelling."

"I've got twenty-five dollars; and we can look in the dictionary. I always thought a fellow was wasting his time learning to spell," said Tom easily.

Macurdy Green shook his head doubtfully.



"I wish I could get more'n three months' schooling in a year. I'm awful shaky on grammar," he said dejectedly.

Tom's manner lost something of its easy assurance. "I'm stuck there too," he admitted candidly. "Grammar is for girls, anyhow. I said *them* instead of *those* the other night when we had company, and Luella said she thought she should sink through the floor." (Tom, I regret to say, delivered himself of this last clause in a thin falsetto key, in mimicry of Luella.)

"Grammar comes high, but you have to have it," said Macurdy seriously.

"I'll tell you what we could do," said Tom, after a moment of deep reflection. "My sister Luella is great on grammar and spelling. We needn't let her have her name in the paper, but she can look over the — the — patterns."

"The proofs," suggested Macurdy.

"Yes; that's what they call 'em. You know all about it, don't you? How did you find out?" demanded Tom eagerly.

"I always wanted to do it. I don't know how such ideas get into a fellow's head. Uncle Sol Ramsdell at the poorhouse used to pick up every newspaper he could find, and some summer boarders used to send him some after they went home, and I used to read them to him. Jim knows a lot about it too. I think his father was an editor."



"More likely a circus clown," growled Tom.

He didn't at all approve of Macurdy's intimacy with that Jim. They had secrets, too, — Macurdy and Jim, — which they never revealed to him.

"I only have my chores to do after school now, except Saturday, and I'll do more than half the work. I ought to, if you furnish the capital," said Macurdy. "You'll be editor and proprietor, and I'll be assistant editor," he continued modestly. "We'll make a paper that will grow up with us and with the town."

Tom's first impulse was to say that they would share the glory of editorship equally; but it occurred to him suddenly that "Thomas F. Pickering, Editor and Proprietor," would look very imposing at the head of the sheet. And it was Macurdy's own proposition.

Macurdy stifled a little sigh. Perhaps he had hoped that Tom would insist upon his having more of the honors; but Macurdy understood the claims of capital.

He jumped up suddenly from the chopping-block. "I must hurry up," he said. "I've got to get some molasses and some ginger. We're going to make dried-pumpkin pies." Macurdy made a slight grimace, but he drew himself up with a soldierly bearing in his long-tailed coat.

"If she only won't make me wash the dishes with her apron on! *That* hurts," he said.



"You have an awful hard time, 'Curdy," said Tom sympathetically. "We'll put a piece in the paper about her" (the pronouns "she" and "her" were used to darkly designate Mrs. Bigsby), "and about the schoolmaster, and everybody that we don't like."

But these satisfactions of journalism did not strike Macurdy favorably.

"I think that's mean, hitting folks when they haven't got a chance to hit back," he said, shaking his head gravely. "Besides, it isn't business to make people mad. You've got to suit everybody in a paper like that. And we must get advertisements, you know, and make it pay." Macurdy was hurrying off now with his basket, under pressure of the recollection of the dried-pumpkin pies.

"Macurdy is business. I've got just the right one to help me on that paper," reflected Tom. "But I'm not going to have that Jim putting his finger into the pie!

"Stop when you come back," he called after Macurdy. "I'll get father to let me take my twenty-five dollars out of the bank; Uncle Rufus said I was to do whatever I liked with it. And I'll talk to Luella about the grammar."

It happened that Luella came to the door just then with her friend Polly Rawson, who had been calling on her. The girls were chattering about



some fancywork that they were making for a church fair.

"What are you going to do for the fair?" Polly Rawson called to Tom. "There is so little that a boy can do," she added condescendingly. "But we are going to have home-made candy for our table, Luella and I; and we'll let you crack the nuts."

Crack the nuts, indeed! Tom growled a half-inaudible refusal, to which they didn't even listen. Polly Rawson was almost a year younger than he was; but she had begun to put on as many airs as if she were twenty, especially since she had her long braid fastened up in a little bob, and had written a composition that the teacher read before the whole school. Tom wished he were not obliged to ask a girl to help about the paper. Perhaps it really would have been better for a fellow to give his mind to spelling and grammar, he thought regretfully.

Luella had seated herself at the piano, and was practising, counting one, two, three, four, with diligent monotony when Tom followed her into the house.

"See here, Luella," — Tom shut the parlor door carefully behind him, — "it's an awful secret, but we're going to publish a paper, Macurdy Green and I, and we're going to let you help a little."

"One, two, three, four," went on Luella, with



provoking indifference. "A paper! you and Macurdy Green! — one, two, three, four — you don't know a thing about it!"

Luella allowed her fingers to fall from the keys with this climax of frankness.

"We know all about it; Macurdy Green and I are the kind that look into things. We only want you to look over the patterns — the proofs — and correct the mistakes. There always are some mistakes, because editors have more important things to think of than grammar and spelling."

"It would be a funny paper with your spelling and Macurdy Green's!" she said. "Macurdy is smart; everybody says so, but *he* never had a chance." (There was an accent on the pronoun which Tom felt to be unpleasantly personal.) "He's awfully sharp at a bargain. You'd better let him *manage* the paper."

"I guess I'm capable of managing my own paper," said Tom, resenting the implied doubt of his abilities.

"I think you'll find that queer boy at the poor-house will have something to do with it if Macurdy Green has," said Luella. "He and Macurdy are very thick. They keep something in Mr. Bigsby's old granary, and nobody can get into the granary or find out what it is. Some people think it is money; that boy wouldn't know any better than to steal, and Macurdy thinks so much of him that



he would keep him from getting found out. And some people think it's a pony that he hid away in the woods when the circus was here, and before he was sick. Very queer noises have been heard there."

"You and Polly Rawson know such a lot of wonderful things," said Tom scornfully.

The truth was, that it was a sensitive point with Tom that Macurdy did not take him into his confidence about the mysterious occupants of that old granary, which were reported to be almost everything imaginable, from bags of gold to the queer little animals which had performed such wonderful tricks at the circus. Tom then and there resolved to tell Macurdy, pleasantly but firmly, that before he became connected with his newspaper enterprise he must share with him the secret of that granary.

"There's always a managing editor and a literary editor," continued Luella, returning to the subject of the paper. "Polly Rawson's uncle owns a paper, and Polly knows all about it. We talked it over when we thought of having a paper for the fair. You can be the publisher, Macurdy Green the managing editor, and I'll be the literary editor."

"A lot you will!" cried Tom, with scornful roughness.

"Provided that my name is printed on the



paper in very large letters, that I have as many copies as I like to give away, and that I can put in my friends' pieces. But of course you'll be glad to have those; for Nell Tapley writes beautiful poetry, and Abby Atwood can make up conundrums and funny things that you would think came out of a grown-up paper, and Polly can write fairy stories. Don't you remember her composition, 'The Enchanted Pumpkin Seed'?"

"Haven't you got cheek!" cried Tom hotly. "Do you think we want a lot of girly things like that? It's going to be a very different sort of paper from that, I can tell you! Of course it will only be a boys' paper now, but we expect it to grow up with us and with the town," — Tom quoted unblushingly from Macurdy, really feeling as if that had been his own idea, — "and that by and by it will be the paper of the county. I can tell you such things have happened. There's a boy in New York" —

"It depends a great deal upon the sort of boy he is. I hope it won't prove like the poultry or the asparagus business." And after these "mean little flings," as Tom called them, — for he had made disastrous failures in the two occupations which she mentioned, — Luella began again to play, and to count her provoking one, two, three, four, as if the great enterprise in which Tom had asked her help were of no account whatever.



"I guess we can get along without girls," he said loftily. But even as he uttered this proud boast Tom's heart sank at the thought of the gibes and sneers that would follow any errors in grammar or spelling that might appear in the paper.

"That Luella!" Tom grumbled. She once had to have apples and oranges divided into sections over and over again before she could get fractions into her head; she couldn't throw a ball straight to save her life, nor drive a nail without pounding her fingers black and blue; but she knew just which way the "i" and the "e" went in "deceive" and "believe" and all such dreadful words, and when to say "whom" instead of "who," and she said "lie down" to Towser, instead of "lay down," as a natural boy did, just as easily as she breathed.

Tom felt that it was a world in which things were very unfair; and he turned away from Luella and her one, two, three, four with a heavy sigh.

Macurdy must think of a way in which they could make that paper the great success that they meant to have it — in time the paper of the county — without girls.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE "MANAGING" EDITOR.

"I THINK we'd better propitiate 'em," Macurdy said, shaking his head sagely, when Tom told him of Luella's exactions, and called upon him to think of some way by which the paper could be made correct in grammar, and yet dispense with the services of girls.

"You can't leave girls out of your calc'lations," he continued seriously. "They kind of hang together; and if you get them all down on the paper, why, you might as well not have any paper — that's all."

"They'll want to fill it full of compositions; the kind they tie up with blue ribbons, all about flowers and little brooks," said Tom dejectedly.

"It ought to be easy to *manage* girls; we'll manage 'em," said Macurdy.

But Tom shook his head gloomily. "You haven't got a sister," he said.

It was finally arranged that Luella should be allowed to call herself the "literary editor," in very small type, and that everybody, "girls 'n' all,"



as Macurdy said, should be at liberty to send in contributions, but that nothing should appear in the paper without the consent of "the whole editorial staff." (That phrase was also Macurdy's.)

"She can't complain of that; they can't any of 'em complain," said Macurdy, with a modest sense of being equal to the occasion.

Tom didn't feel quite so sure of Luella's "sweet reasonableness," but the readiness with which Macurdy took hold of difficulties was cheering.

The question of the paper's name came up next. Tom wished to call it *The War Whoop*, or *The Boomerang*, or at least *The 'Scutney Boom*; he thought it should be a name that would make people understand that they were "up and coming." But Macurdy thought those names sounded more like a paper that was going to stir up things just for a while, than one that was meant to last. An ordinary "grown-up name" was much better; he liked *The Journal*, or *The News*, or *The Sun*, or —  
"Or *The Mail*," suggested Tom.

And Macurdy thought that name the best of all, because it sounded as if news had come from the world outside as well as from 'Scutney.

Tom gave up his striking names the more readily because he had thought of the best one of the "grown-up" kind; it didn't look well for Macurdy Green to think of everything when he was the proprietor of the paper.



"I'm going to send to Hebron for the paper and ink, Monday," he said. "Father says I may. And he says we may have our old tool-house for a publishing-house and office; there are two rooms, you know. I wish it was nearer the street."

Macurdy shook his head decidedly. "Plenty of people will come. Editors don't like to be bothered."

"We'll have the old building painted" — began Tom.

"Next spring," interrupted Macurdy. "We must be sure that the paper is going to pay first."

"You're the greatest fellow to think about making things pay," said Tom. "But I should like to know how it pays you to spend so much time on that Jim!" he went on in an aggrieved tone. "He was on the wagon with you and Mr. Bigsby coming home from the store, and that was why you couldn't stop, I s'pose. You'd got to help him take care of that bundle he was carrying."

Tom had a well-developed bump of curiosity, and he thought he ought to know what there was in that bundle which Macurdy had been helping Jim to hold on to as the wagon jolted along. When he reached Farmer Bigsby's that afternoon, he had found Jim just locking the door of the granary, and thrusting the key hastily into his



pocket; that queer-looking bundle was probably locked up there. Tom wouldn't ask what it was; he had asked what there was in that granary too many times already, only to receive an evasive reply. But he sternly resolved that he would very soon make Macurdy understand that between a publisher and his editor there must be no secrets.

Macurdy's freckled face grew red up to the rim of Farmer Bigsby's old hat. "Jim hasn't got anybody but me," said he. "He and I are just alike; we haven't got anybody but each other. And he knows a lot more than folks think he does, if his mind does trouble him some. He'll help us about the paper."

"I don't think that would do," said Tom, in quick alarm. Who knew but Jim would expect to have *his* name on the paper as some kind of editor? "He isn't what you could call very smart, anyway." Tom tried to speak delicately, for Macurdy was sensitive.

"If he should write what he knows about animals, I guess you'd want it in the paper," said Macurdy stoutly. "There's nobody 'round here that knows so much."

"That's because he belonged to a circus company, I s'pose," said Tom.

But Macurdy shook his head. "I don't think he had belonged to it for long," he said. "He doesn't seem to remember much about it. And



the circus people said he had run away from home and joined them only a little while before they got here."

"Some people think he's rich, and that he's hiding money 'round," hazarded Tom, glancing at Macurdy.

"That's a likely story, isn't it?" said Macurdy scornfully. "I wish I knew where he came from," he went on anxiously. "I'm afraid they'll send him to the State poor-farm in the spring. It doesn't belong to 'Scutney to take care of him, and the selectmen are talking about it. He doesn't have a very bad time here, if he does have to make up beds and wash dishes. I used to wash dishes for him; that's how I learned to do it so well that Mrs. Bigsby makes me do it all the time." And Macurdy heaved a long sigh, from a consciousness that good deeds do not always bring the reward that one might expect.

"I wish Jim could find his own folks, or that you would stop trying to be own folks to him," grumbled Tom. "I'm afraid it's going to be a hindrance to that paper."

"A fellow has to have more than one thing on his mind in this world," said Macurdy with an anxious glance towards the old granary.

Tom made up his mind that it was time for a serious remonstrance with Macurdy; but just as he had braced himself against the pig-pen and pre-



pared to begin, girls' voices were heard eagerly calling, "Tom Pickering!" and Nelly Lamphier and Bobsy Briggs came running into the barn.

Tom felt a sudden regret that he had allowed himself to talk about the prospective paper to Halsey Briggs and Dick Lamphier on his way over to see Macurdy. Some brothers had to run to their sisters with everything, he thought indignantly.

"We want to put advertisements into the paper right away, the very first number!" announced Bobsy.

"If there's a good circulation," interposed Nelly Lamphier. "Uncle Albert said we mustn't promise any ads — that's what he called them, ads — unless you can guarantee a good circulation."

"Girls again!" ejaculated Tom, under his breath.

"I want to advertise my three Angora kittens," pursued Bobsy, who had a less prudent mind than her friend. "They must give five dollars apiece and love them, and six for the white one; and shall I pay nails, or pins, or cookies? I *can* pay a large doughnut-boy — or even twins."

Bobsy evidently felt a great sense of importance from her ability to make so munificent an offer, and she was much astonished at Macurdy's laugh and Tom's scowl.

"Nails and doughnut-boys, indeed!" cried Tom



scornfully — as scornfully as if he had not himself done much business with such commodities as legal tender. "If you want to advertise your kittens you can pay so much a line — so much money. I don't know whether we want to take such advertisements" —

"Oh, yes, yes!" hastily interposed Macurdy, who had an eye to business. "Twenty-five cents for one insertion, thirty-seven cents for two; you'd better take two. If you only sold one kitten, it would pay you to advertise. You can't expect, you know, to sell your kittens for five dollars apiece, and pay us only doughnut-boys for advertising them."

Bobsy pulled her worsted Tam o'Shanter down over her stubby tow-colored bangs, as if it were a thinking-cap, and reflected deeply.

"This is real business," explained Macurdy. "We expect to get up a paper that will grow up with us."

Bobsy and her friend looked at each other.

"We didn't think of its being a truly paper. You're only boys," said Nelly Lamphier.

"Have you got truly kittens to advertise?" asked Tom, with what he felt to be great acuteness. "Or are they only those stuffed things that the girls make?"

"They're real, live kittens!" said Bobsy indignantly. "And I like it better to advertise them



in a real paper," she added. "I'm awful sick of make-believes. But I can't pay until the kittens are sold."

"Maybe you think we're like those medical fellows that advertise 'no cure, no pay,' " said Tom angrily.

"We've got to propitiate 'em," whispered Macurdy.

"I can pay when I open my bank. It will open when there are ten dollars in it, and there are fifteen cents now," said Bobsy hopefully.

"I think we can make an arrangement that will be satisfactory, Miss Briggs," said Macurdy politely. "And we shall be open for business in our — our counting-room and editorial sanctum, on Dr. Pickering's grounds, by the last of next week."

Bobsy was so greatly abashed by this ceremonious speech that she slowly drew off her mitten and thrust her thumb into her mouth, while Nelly Lamphier stared at Macurdy for a moment, and then drew her friend away.

"'D you see me manage 'em?" demanded Macurdy.

"They're only little ones: wait until you have to manage the big ones; then we'll see who's the managing editor," said Tom.

"I don't expect that paper is going to be published without any difficulties," said Macurdy seriously. "That isn't the way of this world. But I



like to pounce right on to difficulties, and get the upper hand of 'em. It makes a fellow feel as if he was somebody."

"You can't pounce on to girls and — and crazy folks."

Tom had caught sight of Jim coming towards the barn, and felt vaguely irritated. He said to himself that he wished he ever could come to see Macurdy without having to see that Jim.

Jim stopped at the granary door and tried it, with an anxious look; then he went to the window, and tried to peer in at the sides of the paper curtain which had been roughly nailed up.

"It's all right, Jim," called Macurdy. And Jim turned and came towards the boys with an expression of childish satisfaction replacing the anxiety on his face.

"All right," he repeated, "snug and warm." And then he said something in a low tone to Macurdy. It was about sleeping in the granary, or having a burglar-alarm; or so Tom thought, from the few words that came to his ears. He didn't mean to listen, but he could hardly help pricking up his ears a little at that. Macurdy evidently did not care to have any private conversation with Jim in Tom's presence.

"It's all right, all right, Jim," he repeated reassuringly. "And the paper is all right too. We're going to print the first number next week."



"So Macurdy has had to go and tell Jim all about the paper already," thought Tom, with great disgust.

Macurdy had his arm around the boy, and Jim was looking at him with wistful eyes.

"I'll write something for the paper," he said eagerly. "I can write now—just so you can make it out."

Jim had evidently once been able to read and write, but the fever had left him so vacant mentally that he had to begin over again with the little children. There were rough boys in 'Scutney, who had gibed and sneered at Jim for this, and Macurdy had been obliged to thrash them.

"Local items and general news are what we want. And I suppose we shall copy a good deal from other papers," said Tom, with a view to discouraging Jim.

"I'll write you all about the Queen of Sheba," said Jim eagerly. "All I can remember," he added, with a touch of patient dejection. "I had forgotten all about her until that day that I went to Hebron with you and Mr. Bigsby, 'Curdy. She wasn't in the circus—do you think she was, 'Curdy? Where do you suppose I was when I had her?" There was a pathetic wistfulness in his voice, and he laid his hand pleadingly on Macurdy's shoulder.

"Never mind, old fellow; you'll remember all



about it when you get strong," said Macurdy cheerfully, but rather gruffly, because of a lump in his throat.

"We can't have Bible stories, you know; it isn't going to be a Sunday-school paper," said Tom; and he said it the more roughly because he was afraid his voice was a little husky: *he* wasn't going to be a softy about that fellow.

"Write it, Jim," said Macurdy. "Of course we can't put everything into the paper, but we'll see, we'll see!"

It appeared to Tom that Macurdy was taking a great deal upon himself about that paper. He'd better remember whose money was going to pay for it!

Jim went off, and Tom was preparing to speak his mind to Macurdy about his encouraging Jim to write for the paper, when Teddy Norcross and Orrin Seaver came running up to the barn door.

"I say, Tom! who is going to report the ball games for your paper? There's the Hebrons and the 'Scutneys next Saturday, and" —

"Jolly! I never thought of that!" exclaimed Tom.

But Macurdy interrupted him. "We shall do those things ourselves—with such help as our friends want to give us," he explained.

"I want a new bat, and I thought maybe I could earn it that way," said Teddy Norcross in a dis-



appointed tone. "I'm just the fellow. And tennis games in summer" —

"You see, a 'Scutney paper can't afford to hire reporters in the beginning, anyway," said Macurdy. "But we're sure that every — every public-spirited citizen will want to help us all he can."

"You don't want any assistant editors, or anything, that would work cheap, do you?" persisted Teddy, who had the reputation of being business-like and thrifty.

"Not yet, anyway; if we should want any" — murmured Macurdy politely.

"We heard that girls were going to b'long," said Orrin Seaver with a somewhat contemptuous accent.

"It's the fashion. We want to keep up with the times; you read about women in journalism, you know. And we think they'll come in handy about — about the fashions and — and crochet-work — a girl's corner, or something like that," said Macurdy, delicately ignoring the sensitive points of grammar and spelling.

"You talk as if 'twas a grown-up paper," said Orrin Seaver a little sulkily.

"We mean it to be a growing-up paper," said Macurdy. "We expect it to grow up" —

"We mean business, and we're going to run it ourselves," said Tom, who felt that Macurdy, with



his fine phrases, had kept him in the background all too long.

There was more than one boy in 'Scutney that day who felt it to be an unkind fate that Tom Pickering owned a printing-press, and was therefore Macurdy's partner instead of himself.

"I tell you what, Macurdy," said Tom, as they separated, planting himself firmly on the ground, and holding his head very high, "I'll get a lot more type. That paper is going to be a Big Thing!"

Luella, for her part, did not keep on counting one, two, three, four after Tom left her. Although she had treated Tom's project with so little respect, no sooner had he gone than she whisked down-stairs to tell Delilah all about it. Delilah was really the housekeeper, though nominally the "hired girl," in Dr. Pickering's family. She was a privileged character, and felt it her duty to talk much to Luella about the influence she ought to have over Tom. Then Luella ran, all out of breath, over to Polly Rawson's, to see what Polly would think of the paper. "Delilah says it will be a great opportunity for us to take some of the didoes out of the boys and elevate them," she said, after she had unfolded the great scheme to the attentive Polly.

"I'm sure they need it," said Polly plaintively. "I wish somebody would do that to our Bing. I



think we'd better help them, Luella. And I'll let them print 'The Enchanted Pumpkin Seed.'"

It was after nine o'clock that night — and nine o'clock was 'Scutney bedtime — when Tom, on his way to bed, answered a knock at the back door and found Macurdy.

"I couldn't come before," he said breathlessly. "I've had to chop mince-meat and knit a stent; *she* don't know I've come now. I want you to let Jim put his piece into the paper. It will do him such a lot of good in his mind. And so I wanted you to know that the Queen of Sheba is only a turkey — a big white turkey."

"I didn't know we were going to print a paper to help people's minds," said Tom sulkily. "And I don't like such a lot of mysteries!" Tom glanced meaningly across the field towards the old granary, which stood out white in the moonlight, although it was weather-worn and gray.

"It's awful cold, isn't it?" said Macurdy, his gaze following Tom's anxiously. "And if Jim wants to put anything into the paper about Sarah Loud, I think we'd better let him. It will be awful interesting."

"If she's anybody that 'Scutney folks know," said Tom — for he didn't want to quarrel with Macurdy.

"I tell you we're going to do great things with that paper, Tom," said Macurdy evasively, as he



pulled his woollen comforter up over his ears and trudged away.

"I s'pose Sarah Loud is somebody that they've got shut up in the old granary," said Tom to himself, with what he thought was sarcasm, as he went off to bed.



## CHAPTER III.

## EDITORIAL TRIALS.

THE old tool-house was painted, after all, before it was thought fit to serve as the publishing-house and editorial sanctum of *The 'Scutney Mail*. Macurdy Green, like Mrs. John Gilpin, might have a prudent mind; but the literary editor of the *Mail*, Miss Luella Pickering, wanted "to have things look nice." Old Uncle Sol Ramsdell, who was devoted to newspapers, offered to do the painting without other pay than an occasional copy of the *Mail*; and Tom, who had an inexperienced belief in the "stretchability" of twenty-five dollars, joyfully purchased the paint.

It looked very smart and shining when it was done; but by the time the imposing gilt-lettered sign, *The 'Scutney Mail*, was hung over the door, Tom had spent all his twenty-five dollars, and broken open his "motto" bank, with the motto, which had sprung out the last time he put money in, staring him in the face, "Small beginnings make great endings."

Macurdy, who believed in small beginnings,



strongly disapproved of this recklessness; but he could only agree to Tom's often-repeated and frank assertion that "it wasn't *his* twenty-five dollars."

It was arranged that the proceeds should be evenly divided between the editors after a certain percentage on Tom's money had been deducted.

The 'Scutney tradesmen, who were disposed at first to regard the paper as boys' play, — one of the "make-believes" of Bobsy Briggs's dislike, — ended by allowing the *Mail* to print their advertisements at a very low rate; and a concert company that gave an entertainment in the Town Hall not only advertised in the paper, but had its programmes and circulars printed by that press.

This success thrilled Macurdy's practical business soul. But it was the beginning of a danger.

Bing Rawson, who was Polly Rawson's brother, wanted to have his finger in the editorial pie. That was what Tom told Macurdy, warningly, in the very beginning. Bing Rawson was only thirteen, and a little fellow who had red cheeks and baby-blue eyes, and looked like a cherub; but it was the general verdict that Bing was full of mischief. Although not devoted to his books, Bing had very quick perceptions and a retentive memory, and was one of the few boys to whom spelling and grammar seemed to "come natural." And it was Bing's ambition to supplant the literary editor.



Bing was very apt to come gallantly to the front when anything was happening in 'Scutney. It was he who enjoyed the proud privilege of touching off the cannon at the Fourth of July celebration; it was he who had a complimentary ticket to the circus, and sat well up in front, and on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion rode in the chariot with the Fat Lady; it was he who spoke the longest "piece" at school exhibitions and Sunday-school festivals, and who acted the part of the page in the Village Improvement Society's play.

Bing's great friend and ally was Derrick Croome, a much larger boy than he, and inclined to rougher ways and more serious mischief. The Rawson family, from Grandma Rawson down to Polly, made a constant effort to keep Bing from associating with Derrick Croome; but so far it had been unsuccessful.

When the printing business began, Bing thought that the least they could do would be to let him help at that; when that privilege was denied him, — although his sister Polly was the intimate friend of the literary editor, and expected to have her story, "The Enchanted Pumpkin Seed," printed in the paper, — he demanded to be allowed to distribute the concert circulars and programmes — work for which the contract had been taken by the printers. Derrick Croome enforced this demand by threatening to "punch their heads" and knock



their partly set up paper into "pi." (Derrick's father had been a printer in the city where they came from.) And another and even worse threat Derrick Croome, who was Mrs. Bigsby's nephew, added to these terrifying ones:—

"I'll tell my aunt what you keep in the old granary, you and that foolish fellow. She's going to put her foot down on that granary business, anyhow, and on the paper too, if I tell her what I'm going to if Bing don't get his rights."

Macurdy calmly shut the door in the face of the enemy. It was not that the last direful threat did not move him; on many a cherished hope and plan of his had Mrs. Bigsby put down her foot. If any threat could make him flinch, it was that one of turning Mrs. Bigsby's attention afresh to his occupancy of the old granary. But Macurdy was not of the flinching kind, and that was all there was about it.

"They're an awful pair," said Tom dejectedly. "Bing isn't so bad, and he wouldn't dare to do much, but with Derrick Croome to back him"—

Tom shook his head dismally. It was a dismal-looking head, for mumps had developed on both sides at once, and Tom was not in a state to take cheerful views of things.

"I guess we sha'n't be bullied into giving any fellow a job," said Macurdy, busily setting type. This was the third issue of the paper; and Jim's



story of the Queen of Sheba was to appear, and Macurdy was especially anxious that there should be no mistakes in that. "Besides, we promised the job to little Tim Golden, who wants to buy shoes for the twins. When a boy has to help his mother that's a widow — Those threats won't come to anything, you'll see," added Macurdy, as he worked away.

And perhaps the threats might not have amounted to anything if something had not happened to increase Derrick Croome's wrath against the editors and the proprietor of *The 'Scutney Mail*. It happened that very day, after Bing Rawson and Derrick had walked slowly away, engaged in low and confidential conversation, that little Lizzie Magill, who lived with her old grandmother and her lame brother Patsy in a lane off the river road, came running in, tearful and breathless, to beg that "a piece" about Derrick Croome's dog might be put into the paper.

"We're thet in drid of him that we hardly dares to stir out of the house," said Lizzie. "Me grandmother is afther havin' her petticoats torn, and she bringin' home the washin'; and little Patsy does be that frightened since he was bit by him, that we can't get him to go to school at all, at all. And the fairther himself bein' s'lectman, and ownin' the bit uv a place over our heads, what can the loikes of us do at all? And so will ye put the rashkill



of a dog, and the big bad boy Derrick Croome that owns him, in your paper, and niver let on I asked you, and I'll thank ye kindly, and so will manny more besides!"

Macurdy looked more and more troubled as he listened to Lizzie's recital of her grievances, and Tom's mumpy face grew dismally long.

"You — you run along now, Lizzie, and we'll see what we can do," said Macurdy. "It — it's a pretty serious matter." And Lizzie went reluctantly out, reiterating the woful tale of the grandmother's petticoats and Patsy's enforced absence from school.

"I guess it *would* be a serious matter to meddle with Derrick Croome just now," said Tom.

"Look here, now, Tom!" Macurdy mounted the high stool in the composing-room, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "This is a square issue. I've talked a good deal about making this paper pay; but I've thought, too, about having it take a right stand about things. Of course we don't want to meddle with politics, and things that are too big for us; but when anything disturbs the peace and comfort of the town, like that vicious dog, I think it belongs to the press to say something about it. Of course we don't *want* to tackle Derrick Croome."

"Well, I rather think we don't!" said Tom hastily and heartily.



"But I don't want to have anything to do with a paper that's afraid to take the right stand when the community needs its influence!" said Macurdy.

Tom felt a great admiration for Macurdy's flow of language, and he wished that he had listened more attentively to the minister and the Fourth of July orators; but he wasn't inclined to risk quite so much for principle as Macurdy was. But he came around to Macurdy's views at length, the usual result of Macurdy's eloquence, or of his stronger spirit; and Macurdy wrote "a piece," setting forth the danger and distress occasioned by a vicious dog, and, although he called no names, making it perfectly evident that it was Derrick Croome's dog that he meant. The "piece" was written and set up that very afternoon, and Derrick Croome read it the next day but one.

And the next week something happened. The mumps had gone hard with Tom, and he was convalescing slowly; and Macurdy had unfortunately had an unusual number of hard "stents;" and they had both been obliged to work with might and main at odd moments to get started on this week's paper; and they were not a little anxious as to whether they should get it all set up in time. There had been prophecies that that paper would soon fail to appear, having only boys to manage it; and they both felt that to have those prophecies fulfilled would be an unendurable disgrace.



So it happened that after a hard and anxious and feverish day — he had been obliged to work on the sly, because it was not thought proper that a boy too ill to go to school should be occupied in printing a newspaper — Tom was sound asleep at eleven o'clock at night, and entirely oblivious of stealthy noises about the publishing-house.

Luella, too, who, with editorial work and music and a church fair, found quite enough to occupy her out of school-hours, was tired enough to sleep well, and to hear nothing of the marauders who were ruthlessly fulfilling Derrick Croome's threat of knocking the precious forms of *The 'Scutney Mail* into "pi."

But Polly Rawson, a little way farther down the street, had been having a bad dream. Polly meant to be a good sister, and Bing often lay heavily on her mind; and she dreamed that Bing had turned into a flapjack (that was Grandma Rawson's name for griddle-cakes), and when she tried to turn him on the griddle he went flopping into the fire. Polly awoke with a start, fairly jumping up in bed, and for a moment it seemed as if the dream really must be true. Polly had a very vivid imagination, as you would know if you could read "The Enchanted Pumpkin Seed."

Presently she heard a very queer noise directly under her window, — a noise of footsteps and light wheels, and a queer little rattle mingled with it.



Polly sprang out of bed and hurried to the window. There were two figures, — Bing's small and slender one and great hulking Derrick Croome's, — and Bing's hand-cart piled full of something that rattled as the boys drew the hand-cart cautiously along.

Polly had heard from her friend, the literary editor, of Derrick Croome's threat; and she saw instantly that it was being put into execution. Not only had the printing been knocked into pi, but they had stolen and were carrying away the type, and probably the press itself; for something loomed large and black in the semi-darkness, — the full moon was just then covered with light clouds, — and they evidently had a heavy load.

Something startled the boys, and they began to run. Polly checked her first impulse to call after them, to arouse the house. That course would involve so much delay; and this was more serious mischief than Bing often indulged in. It would certainly cause his busy and long-suffering father to fulfil his threat of sending him away to school; and Polly did not think that a large school, where he would have no sister to look after him, was the place for Bing.

These thoughts were swift ones; Polly was dressing herself while they flashed through her mind. She stole softly down-stairs, slipped on a warm jacket and cap, got out her bicycle as noise-



lessly as possible, mounted it, and was off in pursuit of the thieves.

What were they going to do with their spoils? If it were only a little lighter, so that she could see them far ahead! The January thaw had extended into February, and the ground was so slightly frozen that the cart-wheels made but little noise; yet, straining her ears when she came to a turn in the road which made her uncertain which way to go, Polly detected the distant rumble and rattle of the hand-cart. The poorhouse pond! They meant to throw the contents of the hand-cart into the pond! Polly's heart sank as this suspicion grew into certainty; for by the light of the moon, which had emerged from the clouds, she saw that the cart had turned into the lane by the poorhouse which led to the pond,—a small sheet of water, but so deep that there had always been a village tradition that it had no bottom.

If the boys had meant to secrete the press or the type, returning it after a while, it would have seemed more like merely boyish mischief; but to destroy it was a depth of wickedness into which she would scarcely have believed that Bing could be enticed.

A feeble and flickering light burned in an upper window of the poorhouse as Polly, not having decided upon any plan of action, but afraid to hesitate, turned into the lane. The light disappeared



as she rode, swiftly and as softly as possible, down the lane, and suddenly reappeared at the open door of the poorhouse. It was a candle held above Jim's tall yellow head. Jim extinguished it suddenly, and ran towards the pond. He turned at the sound of Polly's wheel, and shrank back in evident alarm as she drew near.

"Jim! Jim! don't be afraid," she said softly. "I'm trying to stop some mischief, and you must help me!"

"You — you're a girl on a bicycle, aren't you?" said Jim slowly, with an accent of relief. "You looked like a witch, growing bigger and bigger in the moonlight. Yes, I know there's mischief; those boys that went along with a hand-cart are Derrick Croome and Bing Rawson."

A heavy splash came to their ears, and Polly cried out frantically, as she slipped from her bicycle beside the boys at the water's edge, "Bing, don't you dare to destroy property like that! I'll ring my bicycle bell, and arouse every one in the poorhouse, and have you arrested."

"We — we didn't throw anything overboard but a rock," stammered Bing, startled out of his accustomed audacity by the sudden appearance of his sister.

"You did it to see how deep the water was! You meant to throw the press into the water," said Polly accusingly.



Jim seized the handle of the cart from Derrick Croome. "They're Macurdy's things, and I'm going to take care of them," he said, as if it were a matter of course.

Derrick loosed Jim's hold with a jerk and a rough push, and Jim fell heavily, striking his head against the cart-wheel; he arose to his feet staggering, and a trickle of blood was plainly visible upon his cheek in the moonlight.

"I—I didn't mean to hurt him," stammered Derrick, evidently a little frightened. "But I ain't going to have a girl or a foolish fellow interfering with me!" Derrick moved the cart towards the edge of the pond, and prepared to tip its contents into the water.

Polly uttered a half-smothered cry, and put her hand on her bell. It had a sharp ring, that little bell, and would arouse every one in the poorhouse; and it would bring disgrace upon Bing, trouble upon his father and mother. Perhaps Derrick Croome had some misgivings, or the cart was heavy to tip; and in the moment's pause the poorhouse door opened, and a tall figure came hurrying out.

"Here's Mr. Peters with his gun!" cried Polly.

Bing's small person instantly disappeared from sight behind a tree, and Derrick Croome—well, what could you expect? A bad boy like him is almost always a coward—Derrick Croome ran



away, behind the trees that bordered the pond, over the stone wall, and across the pasture.

And, after all, it was only Caddy Forsythe who had come out of the poorhouse door — Caddy Forsythe with her broom. She was a poor insane woman, whose husband and sons had been lost at sea, and she swept and swept with a broom, to sweep away trouble. She was harmless, and wandered about at her own will day and night. She wandered off to the barn, sweeping diligently, and without seeing the group by the pond.

For once, thought Polly, poor Caddy Forsythe's broom had swept away trouble.

Bing emerged from his retirement.

"Derrick Croome's a coward!" he said wrathfully. "I wouldn't have run away and left him like that!"

Polly was helping Jim to wipe the blood from his face.

"We can take the cart back without any of his help," she said, resolved to strike while the iron was hot. "And though you've spoiled the paper for this week, perhaps what you meant to do need never be known — unless you want to confess it, and do all you can to make up for it."

"I guess not much!" responded Bing gruffly, but with a little uneasy laugh. "They put in a piece about Derrick's dog; and they were sarsy, and wouldn't give me a job."



"This was a noble, a manly revenge, wasn't it? O Bing Rawson!" began Polly hotly. But she checked herself. One must manage Bing. Being a sister was not easy. "I will leave my bicycle, — Jim will take care of it, — and help push the cart," she said.

But Jim declared that he was not hurt, and he would help push the cart. They were Macurdy's things; he wanted to take care of them. Oh, no, he would not be missed, he said, in answer to Polly's question. He had been sitting up writing the "piece" about Sarah Loud for the *Mail* when he heard the noise of the cart in the lane.

"*You* can't help much; you're only a girl," growled Bing, glad of a chance to emphasize any point of superiority to Polly, who thought herself so superior.

So the little midnight procession started hurriedly; for Caddy Forsythe had come out of the barn, still sweeping busily, and she was coming towards them, as if she thought them something to be swept away.

Polly, going ahead on her bicycle, saw in the bright moonlight, as she turned out of the lane, a wreath of smoke curling upward, behind Farmer Bigsby's house — a curling smoke and a swiftly leaping flame.

"The old granary, Bing! Derrick Croome has set the old granary on fire!" she cried.



## CHAPTER IV.

## "OUR BOY'S PAPER."

ACROSS the fields was the nearest way from the poorhouse lane to Farmer Bigsby's old granary; and across the fields they trooped, Polly leaving her bicycle beside the stone wall, which she climbed as nimbly as the boys — more nimbly, indeed, than Jim, who was pale and trembling.

"He'll be burnt up, — Sarah Loud and all the others!" he gasped, as Polly tried to encourage him by hopeful prophecies.

"Is Sarah Loud a *he*?" asked Polly, feeling that the emergency justified a little indulgence of her curiosity.

"I named him after somebody that I used to know," said Jim evasively, — "somebody who liked animals, just as I do. Do you suppose Macurdy has let them out?" he added, his voice strained and sharp with anxiety. "Macurdy says he sleeps with one eye open. I've tried it, and I can't do it; but you know how very smart Macurdy is."

"It's a good thing that the granary is away off



by itself," said Bing, as Jim and Polly overtook him. "Maybe it wasn't Derrick that did it. Anyhow, Polly, you needn't go to hollering like a girl until we see whether we can't put the fire out. The brook is right near there, and it's lucky it isn't frozen."

It had not needed Bing's warning to make Polly wish that they could extinguish the fire without an alarm. Perhaps one ought not to wish that Derrick should not be arrested; but if he were, Bing's share in the adventures of the night would be sure to come out, and it might be difficult to convince people that he was not concerned in the setting of the fire.

The smoke was thicker now, but there was less flame. The fields were miry, and Polly's boots were so heavy with mud that she could no longer run. Bing began to hang back a little, as if he were not altogether inclined to "grace battle's brunt;" but Jim's long legs went steadily on, and when Polly was near enough to him she could hear that he was muttering anxiously about "Sarah Loud."

As Jim approached the granary, with Polly close behind, and Bing's small, hesitating figure bringing up the rear, a tall figure stepped sturdily out from the smoke.

"You needn't be scared, nor make a fuss; I'm here," said Macurdy Green.



"They're all safe — Sarah Loud and all?" demanded Jim breathlessly.

"Yes, all are safe. I was afraid they'd smother, but there's no danger now. He — that rascal of a Derrick Croome," — it almost seemed as if sparks flew out of Macurdy's gray eyes, — "pried open the door after he had set the fire. Perhaps he wanted to let 'em out. I don't know as he is bad enough to burn live things up, but I think he wanted to steal some of 'em; and Sarah Loud bit him. He hollered, and I heard him. I sleep in the woodshed chamber; and I've been sleeping with one eye open lately — kind of expecting there was mischief brewing."

"You treated us pretty mean, but I wouldn't set things afire," said Bing, digging in the ground with his heel. "Derrick Croome's a coward, anyway."

"You leave him to Sarah Loud!" said Macurdy, with undisguised satisfaction. "He can bite."

Jim opened the granary door and entered. Queer chattering and scolding noises came from inside.

"I knew there were live things in there, squirrels and things; all the fellows say so; but I wish't I knew who Sarah Loud is," said Bing.

"Ain't you ever going with Derrick Croome again — s'long's you live?" demanded Macurdy solemnly.



"Honest and true, black and blue!" responded little Bing with equal solemnity.

"Well, Sarah Loud is something that you don't very often see tamed. Jim can tame wild things. I suppose it's because he likes 'em so. Sarah Loud is in a big cage, and he likes it pretty well, anyhow; and he knows Jim and me, and wouldn't bite us. And he's a weasel. Some day if you come over, you and your sister—we don't often show him to girls, but—but—you and she can see him."

Polly was not very enthusiastic about the weasel; but she appreciated Macurdy's stammeringly conveyed compliment, and gravely accepted the invitation.

"I wish you would go home now, without making a bit of noise," said Macurdy frankly. "The fire's all out, and I don't want *her* to get wind of it," with a significant nod towards the house. "She won't be likely to see any signs of it, because she's lame, and don't get 'round much; but if she should hear of it she'd be awful apt to put her foot down."

"Then you won't have Derrick Croome arrested?" asked Polly eagerly.

"I'll just leave him to Sarah Loud!" said Macurdy confidently.

Bing wondered what Macurdy would think was bad enough for *him*, if he knew of the confusion



and desolation in the *Mail* office, and of the hand-cart with its load that was standing beside the stone wall in the poorhouse lane. And he hurried back across the field as fast as Polly herself — Polly, who had been seized with a sudden fear lest Derrick Croome should come upon the hand-cart, and, with anger freshly aroused by Sarah Loud's bite, wreak his vengeance upon it.

The cart was there, with its contents safe ; and Bing pushed it homeward with might and main. Jim had offered to go with them to help ; but he was evidently so tired, and so anxious about his pets in the granary, that Polly positively declined his aid, asking only that he should take care of her bicycle.

There had been a heavy strain both on Polly's nerves and muscles ; but she had heard Bing's promise to Macurdy Green, — and an excellent thing about Bing was that he kept his promises, — and that lightened the load. They could not bring order out of the confusion in the composing-room of the *Mail*, but they restored the press and the type ; and Polly drew a long breath of relief as Bing softly locked the door behind them. She had carefully avoided reproaching Bing since his promise ; but she turned upon him now with a sudden question, —

“ Where did you get that key, Bing ? ”

Bing hung his cherubic head.



"I heard Luella tell you that she was going to leave it under the mat, so you could go in and look at the proofs of 'The Magic Squash Seed,'" he said.

Polly lay awake thinking how hard it was to be a boy's sister; but Bing — Bing, with all his misdeeds upon his head, slept "as they sleep who do not wake to care." After all, *The 'Scutney Mail* made its appearance that week; but it was not until Saturday night, instead of Thursday, its regular date.

Bing had faced the music manfully, and owned up to his share in the midnight raid, and became, indeed, a recognized ally and aid of the paper, explaining that he "wasn't 'xactly on the staff, but" —

Sarah Loud's punishment of Derrick Croome had been, as Macurdy had prophesied, quite severe enough. He was under the doctor's care, with his hand and arm badly swollen, and with symptoms of blood-poisoning. The identity of Sarah Loud was no longer a mystery, and all the boys in 'Scutney were deeply interested in the tame weasel; but the "piece" about him, which Macurdy's journalistic heart yearned for just now, as timely and striking, was hanging fire, for the excitement and exposure of that adventurous night had been more than Jim could bear, and he was now ill at the poorhouse.



Macurdy's hands were full. Tom's mumps was prolonged; and *The 'Scutney Mail* could not have come out if Farmer Bigsby had not for once put his foot down, and declared that, in spite of the claims of churning and baking, Macurdy should have his Saturday holiday for his own devices. The truth was, that Farmer Bigsby was growing proud of Macurdy, and spoke of the *Mail* as "our boy's paper." The paper sold in Hebron and at the Four Corners, and people were inclined to take it much more seriously than at first; nevertheless, the money did not come in very fast, and Tom was growing rather tired of the work, and very tired of hearing it called Macurdy's paper.

"It's about time there was a piece in that paper about me. I founded it, didn't I?" said Tom to himself discontentedly.

In the spelling-class one day, a week or two after the midnight raid, Tom handed a letter behind his back to Macurdy. They were "toeing the mark," in the primitive fashion that prevailed in 'Scutney, and the teacher's eye was only momentarily absent from them; but Tom had happened to think of that letter, and wanted Macurdy to see it before he forgot it again — a fellow had so many things on his mind, now that spring was coming, and there were more ball-games, and Lon Bailey of Hebron had threatened to thrash him for trying to make out, in the account in the



*Mail*, that the 'Scutneys hadn't a fair show in the last game.

Macurdy took the letter, and found a chance to take a peep at it. It was from Tom's Uncle Rufe, out in Texas; and it said that a family who lived near him had been much interested in the story of the Queen of Sheba, because a young son, who was dead, had made a pet of a white turkey in the same way, and had called her the Queen of Sheba. The family seemed to think it a remarkable coincidence, and wished to know more about the boy who had written the article, especially as it was signed "Jim," and their boy who had died had been called Jimmie. Macurdy didn't think the letter amounted to much. He didn't see why another boy might not have called a turkey the Queen of Sheba, since it was a Bible name with which every one was acquainted; and if it was a queer coincidence, it didn't strike his practical mind as being of much consequence.

Tom forgot it too. Uncle Rufe had expressed very complimentary opinions of the paper, and Tom meant to suggest in his answer that a little more capital could be used to advantage in the development of the paper. Perhaps Uncle Rufe would send him another twenty-five dollars. He covered all four sides of his note-paper with what he considered delicate hints to that effect, but neglected to say who Jim was.



Derrick Croome had been sent away to school by his father as soon as he had recovered from the effects of Sarah Loud's bite; and his vicious dog had been sent off to a farm to be trained into a respectable member of society — this latter departure being a blessing to the community, for which it gave due credit to the boys' paper.

So the boys' enterprise went on with mingled joys and troubles, and plans for bettering things, like the older people's; but Macurdy's troubles were just now so heavy that he had no heart for his joys. Mr. Bigsby had put his foot down for once; and Macurdy had used his Saturday holiday from school, usually a very busy day for "chores" and the housework that he hated, and had been able to bring out the *Mail* in spite of the disaster that had threatened to destroy it; but after this temporary overthrow of Mrs. Bigsby's authority, she had reasserted herself vigorously. She was very indignant that "a wild beast" should be kept on their own premises, which had brought her nephew, Derrick Croome, "to death's door;" and nothing would appease her wrath except Farmer Bigsby's promise that just as soon as it was so warm that the tamed creatures would not suffer by being turned loose into the woods and fields, the boys should be made to take them out of the granary.

There would be no reprieve from that sentence, Macurdy knew; and he knew also that it would



break Jim's heart to lose his pets, — Sarah Loud, the remarkable weasel ; his white mice, which Macurdy had helped him to buy, and which he had brought home from the Four Corners on that memorable day when *The 'Scutney Mail* was projected ; his gray squirrels, and chipmunks, and rabbits.

He would not be allowed to keep them at the poorhouse ; in fact, the question of sending Jim to the State poor-farm was being agitated again. He was ill, and needed constant care ; and the poor-mistress, who was not unkind, but was overburdened with work and care, complained of having a charge that did not rightfully belong to the town.

Jim would die if he should lose his pets, and be sent away from the only place he knew as home, and from him (Macurdy) to whom his heart clung as to his only friend. In some way Macurdy felt he must prevent these trials from coming upon Jim. He was strong, and Jim was weak, so he must take care of the boy ; but how ?

Farmer Bigsby gave him his board and clothing for his work, and he had very little time or opportunity to earn anything more. He feared he should even be obliged to give up the paper now that the spring work of the farm was coming on. Farmer Bigsby had told him so only the other day.

"Ploughin' and plantin' ain't a-goin' to hitch horses with runnin' a newspaper, Macurdy," he had said, shaking his head seriously. "You've



been smart about that paper. I've counted on seein' it jest about as much as I have the *Cultivator*; but it's nothin' but boys' play, after all, and this is a world of solemn realities."

The "solemn realities" sounded so depressing that even Macurdy's stout heart sank for a moment. To drudge through every hour of daylight, with no chance to go to school, no hope of bettering one's fortunes, was, for an ambitious boy like Macurdy, a "solemn reality" indeed; and now this necessity, or what he felt to be a necessity, of caring for Jim had come upon him.

Macurdy was going homeward on the last day of school, with his books strapped upon his shoulder to allow him to ease his mind a little by whistling, and with these heavy thoughts oppressing him. He had for once got past the point where whistling was possible,—he had tried it, and a lump in his throat had stopped him,—when suddenly he remembered a saying of old Uncle Sol Ramsdell's, "There never was a scrape without a way out of it."

"That's true; there always is something that a fellow can do!" said Macurdy to himself. "Sometimes, maybe, it's only to grin and bear it; but that's better than to give up and make a girl of yourself." And Macurdy resolutely swallowed the lump in his throat.

If only Jim were provided for! Suddenly Ma-



curdy remembered the people away off in Texas who had wished to know who the boy was who had written about the Queen of Sheba.

"He might be so like their boy who died that they'd want to adopt him or something," said Macurdy to himself; and he straightway resolved that he would ask Tom that very night to write to his Uncle Rufe, and tell him all about Jim.

The sketch of Sarah Loud was finished, and would appear in this week's paper; and that might still further arouse the interest of those Texas people who had lost their son. Macurdy had helped Jim to write it; and it was, as Macurdy with candid pride declared, "a pretty fair article." Those girls, the literary editor and her friend Polly Rawson, had "tinkered" it a little; they had a knack at straightening a sentence out and turning it round a little, so that a fellow really said what he wanted to better than he knew how to himself; and they did it without making a fellow feel small, either. Macurdy thought that Polly Rawson had exercised a good influence over that Luella, who had, as Tom said, been a little "topping" in the beginning; and he had a much higher opinion of "women in journalism" than when he had begun to edit *The Scutney Mail*.

At the thought of the paper Macurdy had a fresh pang. He felt as if he could not give it up. He should be too tired to work nights, even if Mr.



Bigsby would allow him to ; but he meant to try to get some one — perhaps Polly Rawson, with little Bing to help set type — to do his share of the work until the summer farming was done, and he might have a little leisure again.

He hoped that, with all his other troubles, a rumor that had reached him was not true, — a rumor that at last a weekly paper was to be published in 'Scutney, a real grown-up paper, which would cast the *Mail* entirely into the shade.

It happened rather queerly, as things often do happen in this world, that just as he was thinking of this, a stranger in 'Scutney, a brisk and wide-awake looking man, stopped as they met very near Farmer Bigsby's pasture bars, and with a somewhat quizzical and amused expression, which Macurdy didn't altogether like, asked him if he had the honor of addressing Macurdy Green.

Macurdy responded, in a dignified manner, that Macurdy Green was his name.

"Editor of *The 'Scutney Mail*?" continued the stranger, subduing his quizzical air to one of respect.

"I'm one of the editors," said Macurdy with modest pride. He was suddenly conscious of his old patched jacket, which Mrs. Bigsby had made him wear to school, and of Mr. Bigsby's broad-cloth Sunday trousers — of ten years' standing — which had just fallen to his share ; of his great



clodhopper shoes, and hat with a dilapidated brim ; and he held his head the higher because he had been ashamed of them.

"I'm going to start a paper here — at least, I'm one of a company that's going to, and I'm to be the managing editor," continued the man. "I think there's a good chance for a live newspaper here. Queer that there's never been one."

"There's the *Mail*, you know," said Macurdy with dignity.

"Oh, yes!" The stranger instantly suppressed the slightest of smiles, and spoke very respectfully. "You boys have done well with that little paper. It shows a good deal of cleverness. I've been staying over at Hebron, and I happened to see two or three copies of it. My paper is going to be started next month. We've hired Croome's block on the main street. Now I'm looking for a boy. He'll have to sweep and dust, and do the drudgery ; but — he'll have a chance to work up. And I want a boy who knows the locality, and can pick up bits of local news, as you have in your paper. You see, we shall all be strangers in 'Scutney. I've been inquiring about you, and I think you're just the fellow I want. You won't get much at first, but it will be enough to board and clothe you — decently" (with a glance at Macurdy's peculiar toilet). "And if you are as smart as I think you are, it's a chance for you."



A chance for him! Macurdy thrilled to his finger-tips. The blood rushed to his face and then away again, leaving it pale under the great yellow freckles. It was a way out of his hopeless drudgery; with enough to board and clothe him, he could manage to take care of Jim.

Then came a tug at his heart, — the thought of the little '*Scutney Mail*, the paper that he had meant should grow up with him. But it was Tom's paper. Tom reminded him of it cuttingly very often.

But the wood that he was whittling fell from his hands, and they dropped dejectedly by his side. Then he straightened himself up, and set his dilapidated old hat squarely on his head.

"I'm reg'larly engaged on the *Mail*," he said. "It wouldn't be fair to Tom."

The man threw back his head and laughed. "You take that paper very seriously," he said. "You ought to realize that it's only boys' play."

"Tom won't give it up — Tom Pickering who owns it. He has asked his uncle for money to put it on a firmer financial basis," said Macurdy sturdily.

"Well, well, think it over! I dare say I can find a boy if you don't want the job," said the man a little impatiently, as he started to go.

"I'd like the job — I'd like it well; but I've got to do the fair thing," said Macurdy.



## CHAPTER V.

## MACURDY SENDS A TELEGRAM.

TOM'S whole heart was in the *Mail* — all the more since what he regarded as a rival had appeared in the field in the form of the new paper, which was to be called *The 'Scutney Telegraph*. Macurdy found this out as soon as he talked with the editor. After a long debate with himself he finally decided that to desert Tom and go over to the enemy would be a base thing.

Meanwhile, Tom hung around Croome's block ; he often went into the editorial office, and watched the carpenters at work there. One day the editor, the lively man of Macurdy's acquaintance, came in and spoke to him in a flatteringly friendly fashion, calling him "a brother craftsman," and introduced him to "Mr. McPherson," another member of the *Telegraph* company.

These men thought something of the *Mail*, and they knew, thought Tom proudly. The little quiz-zical air of the editor, which had offended Macurdy, quite escaped Tom.

"You don't happen to know of a boy that we



could get, do you?" asked the editor, after some conversation, in which he had drawn Tom out concerning the affairs of the *Mail*. "A 'Scutney boy with something in him, to grow up with the paper?"

And then he explained the drudgery to be done, and also the chances. And Tom's heart thrilled almost as Macurdy's had done.

"I wish you'd take me!" he said. "I'm awful tired of going to school. I've been wanting to go into business — into real business — for a long time."

"Would your father be willing? Your father is Dr. Pickering, isn't he?" asked the editor.

"Yes, I'm sure he would let me; for this spring and summer, anyway."

"We'll try you, if he's willing," said the editor; and Tom went off feeling as if he walked on air.

It was not until he came within sight of the publishing-house of the *Mail* that he felt a twinge of regret. Every one said that the *Mail* was a great success, — for boys; but they were apt to give all the credit of the success to Macurdy, and to call it Macurdy's paper. And Luella said it was "mean" for him to tell everybody that it was his money, anyway. And he wanted to have something to do with a new enterprise that was creating such a sensation. But what would Macurdy say about giving up the *Mail*? He would be sorry



to have Macurdy disappointed; he would like to do the fair thing by Macurdy.

Macurdy was all unconscious that he was losing not only his chance in life, but the little paper upon which he had worked so hard as well. He went the next day with his ploughshare, only to find when he reached the Four Corners that Nate Brimblecom, the blacksmith, had a felon on his finger, and was not able to sharpen it. In view of such an emergency, Mr. Bigsby had told him to go on to Hebron; his (Mr. Bigsby's) brother was a blacksmith there, and if Macurdy could not get it done in time to bring it home that night, — it being already late in the afternoon, — he was to remain at Mr. Bigsby's brother's all night, and return early in the morning. The plough must be ready for use just as soon as possible.

When Macurdy arrived, the blacksmith was said to be at the railroad station near his shop, and Macurdy went over there to look for him.

A stranger was standing near the stage. He was a young man, stylishly dressed, but with a weak face, and a look which even to Macurdy's inexperienced eyes suggested dissipation. He inquired of Macurdy if that were the conveyance to 'Scutney.

"Do you know anybody over there?" he continued immediately, upon receiving Macurdy's affirmative answer.



"I b'long over there," said Macurdy readily.

"You don't happen to know a boy named Macurdy Green, do you?" asked the young man.

"Well, I'm some acquainted with him," said Macurdy, looking down, and digging his heel into the ground in an embarrassed way. Then he looked up and grinned.

"Oh, you're Macurdy Green, are you?" said the stranger. And he looked Macurdy over with a somewhat puzzled air.

"You have something to do with a little paper that the boys publish over there, and you're great friends with a boy at the poorhouse who has been writing little sketches for the paper?"

Macurdy nodded assent, feeling a vague wonder that his affairs should be spread abroad in the land; for it was evident that the stranger had just arrived in Hebron by train.

"I want to see the boy — Jim. You see, there's a lady out in Texas, where I came from, who lost a boy who was called Jimmie; and he was fond of pets, and this boy reminds her of him. She wanted me to come here and see him. Of course it can't be her son, because we heard positively that he was dead. But her health is broken, — her husband died suddenly soon after the son, — and we have to humor her queer notions. I'm her nephew. Now, I want to see this boy Jim without his seeing me. Of course I don't want to show an interest



in him, to arouse any false hopes in his mind. My aunt's friends don't think it would be well for her to adopt a boy in the present state of her health, even if he did remind her very much of her son who died. But I promised that I would see what he was like, and ease her mind."

The young man spoke in an easy, off-hand way ; but he cast glances of keen curiosity at Macurdy, and ended with an embarrassed little laugh.

"Jim hasn't any friends that I know of," said Macurdy sadly. "I wish I could find out where he came from. He's a little weak in his mind."

"Doesn't remember anything of his life before he came here?" The young man asked the question carelessly, but there was an eagerness in his tone which did not escape Macurdy. Farmer Bigsby had been heard to say that Macurdy hadn't big ears and a sharp nose for nothing.

"No; he doesn't remember even his name. They called him Jim in the circus, so that probably is the name he gave them," answered Macurdy. But he had begun to be careful about what he said.

"And — and Sarah Loud — the name he gave his weasel — was a name that happened to strike his fancy?"

"No ; it was the name of some one he used to know, — an old woman, he thinks, who was kind to him. He gets bewildered when he tries to remember," said Macurdy.



It was Macurdy's turn to look at his questioner now. The young man's face had flushed, and his brows wrinkled anxiously.

"I should like to have a little talk with you," he said at length. "Perhaps it may not be necessary for me to go to 'Scutney at all. I'm sure that it would not be wise for my aunt to adopt the boy, as he is weak-minded."

Macurdy's eyes had wandered towards the travelling-bag which the young man carried. A card hung from it with a name engraved upon it. The stranger tore it off when he saw Macurdy's gaze.

"That's a friend's card; we changed 'grips' by mistake," he said, with a careless air. "My name is Brownlow — George K. Brownlow. As I was going to say, you're a bright, smart fellow, and a friend to the boy. I'm willing to make it for your interest — very much for your interest — to help me keep my aunt from being troubled any further about him. I want to send him away from here — farther East, probably; and I should like to have you go with him to look after him. You and he would both be well provided for — boarded in some family, and you could both go to the best schools; and when you grow up, I'll see that you have a good start in life. I'll do more; I'll give you five thousand dollars when you are twenty-one. I'll put it into a bank for you now, so that you can be sure of it, if — if you'll take good care of Jim,



and — and keep my aunt from finding him if this nervous condition of hers leads her to try.”

The young man looked steadfastly at Macurdy ; and the boy's soul, with its country simplicity and its rugged honesty, was in a tumult. He had thought his experiences as an editor of the *Mail* very exciting, and had felt very wise and sophisticated ; but this was quite a new phase of worldly experience.

Then a sense of responsibility thrilled him. It was for Jim — for Jim that he must sharpen his wits, and find out what this man really meant !

“I couldn't go for a week or more,” he said slowly. “I should have to give Mr. Bigsby time to get another boy to work for him.”

“I shouldn't want you to go until — well, say ten days from now — a week from next Thursday. I've got to go farther East on business, and to find a place for you. And I shall expect you to make things right with the poorhouse people. Of course they'll be glad enough to get rid of Jim ; but they will feel bound to ask questions. You're going to get your chance in the world — the best chance a boy ever had — by knowing how to answer questions without telling anything.”

Macurdy's cheeks burned with the guilty but half-amused consciousness that he was just now taking his first lesson in that art !

“I shall expect you to meet me here with Jim just before the morning train leaves, a week from



Thursday. Be ready to go, and don't come too early—these country people are full of curiosity. And, remember, if you talk about this to anybody, or let Jim talk, I sha'n't want you," and he walked back to the station alone.

The blacksmith could not sharpen that plough-share until morning, and Macurdy had been bidden to stay all night. But the blacksmith and his family went to bed early, and it was only a little past nine o'clock when Macurdy softly led old Tim out of the barn and mounted his bare back. Old Tim was bony, and his gait was eccentric, but Macurdy hung on; he would have preferred to walk, but he felt that there was not time.

A tinkle of gravel against his window and a faint whistle brought Jim down to the poorhouse door.

"Jim, try to remember—think hard!" said Macurdy eagerly, with one hand on Jim's shoulder, and the other holding the halter of the astonished and reluctant old Tim. "Did you ever hear the name of Emmerton—J. Randall Emmerton?"

Jim drew a long, hard breath.

"Emmerton—oh, that's it, 'Curdy!—that's my name! I've tried so long to remember it. I've hoped that I might dream it. Jimmie—James Emmerton; that's who I am. Randall Emmerton; that's who my father is."

"And you had a cousin—tall, with lightish hair but dark eyes, and a queer smile?"



"Randy, Randy! He was wild, and they sent him away. 'Curdy, I think I have a mother like other boys. Do you think so, 'Curdy?"

"I can't tell, Jim. I hope so. I've got to go; I'm in an awful hurry!" Macurdy disengaged Jim's clinging arm, and jumped upon his ancient steed.

"I've got *you*, anyhow, 'Curdy," called Jim's soft, pathetic voice.

"You've got me, anyhow, Jim," came back Macurdy's voice in a stage-whisper, but with emphasis. And Jim went to bed bewildered, but in happy trust, while Macurdy urged old Tim just as fast as he had the heart to do back over the road to Hebron. He roused the sleepy telegraph operator in the Hebron station before the clock struck ten. He wrote out with care the message that he wished to send:—

"Mrs. Randall Emmerton, Waco, Texas. Your son James is in 'Scutney, Massachusetts. Come quick."

Nine words; but he had another quarter, and she might not come unless things were quite plain. Besides, it was worth the other quarter—the last proceeds of *The 'Scutney Mail*—to add, "Your nephew, J. Randall Emmerton, has acted villionous." Macurdy wasn't sure about the spelling of that last word; the girl operator laughed.

"Sign it Editor '*Scutney Mail*," said Macurdy with dignity.



“Coming. Take care of my boy,” was the telegram that Macurdy received, and at the end, “God bless you.”

It happened that the day when Jim’s relatives came — his mother and her daughter’s husband — was the very day and the very morning when the “villionous” nephew had arranged to meet Macurdy at the same station. And so Macurdy met him, with Jim and Jim’s mother beside him. Randy turned pale, and slipped away out of sight as if the earth had swallowed him up.

“Randall never was a good boy,” Jim’s mother said; “but we never thought he could be so bad as he has shown himself. He was to have Jimmie’s share of the property if Jimmie was never found. We never thought he would be, because we heard from the circus company that he ran away with that he was dead. I might never have found my boy if it had not been for you.”

She hugged and kissed Macurdy right there in the railroad station; and Macurdy felt — well, “pretty cheap,” as he afterwards confided to Tom; but nevertheless it was the proudest day of his life — prouder even than when the first issue of the *Mail* was cried about the ‘Scutney streets.

They had lived in New York when Jimmie ran away with the circus, — Jimmie, who had always been delicate, and not quite like other boys, his mother further explained. After Jim’s father’s



death, Jim's mother had gone to live with her daughter in Texas; and there the little 'Scutney paper had reached her through her neighbor, Tom Pickering's Uncle Rufe.

"Well, we never thought the paper would do such a great thing as that, did we?" said Tom, after Macurdy had told him all about it. Macurdy had run over to the *Mail* office as soon as his "chores" were done that noon. The *Mail* had been all ready the day before, but he must help Tom and Bing to deliver it.

He had scarcely seen Tom for a week, and only in the brief spaces of time that he had been able to snatch for work on the *Mail*, when they were both too busy to talk.

Tom now gloomily barred the way to the *Mail* office when Macurdy would have entered. "You'd better not go in," he said, seating himself on the upper step, and beginning to whittle in a faint-hearted and embarrassed way. "I thought you'd find out. Haven't you been into the granary yet?"

"Why, no! I came over here the very first thing after I came from Hebron, and Jim is there at the hotel with his people. We left a lot of food for the animals in the granary last night. Has anything happened to them?" Macurdy's voice was husky with fear.

"Nothing has happened to them except that



Sarah Loud has got away, I s'pose; and a weasel *ought* to get away. What sense is there in trying to tame a weasel?" Tom's voice had an aggrieved tone, and he whittled so vigorously that the chips flew in every direction. "'N' they've ate up the *Mail*."

"*Ate up the Mail?*" echoed Macurdy in bewildered dismay.

"Those girls, Luella and Polly Rawson, were coming home from an apron party at Sar' Abby Blodgett's about half-past nine o'clock last night. When they got near the granary they heard an awful noise — something kind of whisking 'round, and the squirrels scolding as loud as they could. I should like to know where you were that you didn't hear all that racket."

"I slept with Jim at the poorhouse; Mrs. Bigsby had so much company that she had to have my room," explained Macurdy. "Sarah Loud didn't hurt the mice, did he?" he inquired anxiously.

"They were afraid he would, — those girls were, — but when Luella had got in at the window she was scared 'most to death. Sarah Loud had got loose; and Luella just grabbed the cage of white mice, and hopped out of the window with it. She thinks Sarah Loud scooted out after her before she shut the window; but she isn't sure. Well, those girls just put the cage of mice in here; and it wouldn't have done any harm if the door of



the cage hadn't come open. All those mice were scampering and gnawing 'round in here all night!" Tom rose, and threw open the door in impressive silence.

Copies of the *Mail*, which had been arranged in a neat pile ready for delivery, were gnawed and torn, and scattered about the floor; not one copy was left whole and clean. The piles of paper ready for printing were all gnawed at the edges, and a bottle of ink had been overturned upon them, and was still dripping and forming little pools upon the floor; and the type was scattered in all directions.

"Looks as if 'twas the end of *The 'Scutney Mail*, don't it?" said Macurdy; and although he grinned broadly, there was a quiver in his voice. "I've got something to tell you, Tom," Macurdy went on, with an effort. "I know you'll feel bad, and I do myself, though it seems as if I'd got a real chance at last. Jim's mother wants me to go home with them, and she'll send me to school with Jim; and she'll let me pay my way, so I sha'n't be beholden to anybody. I can, you know, Tom; just give me a chance!"

"I guess you can," responded Tom heartily. "You're an awful smart fellow, 'Curdy, and a square one too! I b'lieve you're the squarest fellow I ever knew. I hate to have you go; but — but I guess it's all come 'round right. I — I've



got a chance myself, 'Curdy!" Tom straddled the high stool, and kicked its legs in an embarrassed way. "More'n a week ago those *Telegraph* people offered me a chance in their office. I didn't know until they told me to-day that they'd offered it to you first. It was square of you to stick to the *Mail*, 'Curdy, awful square! I thought I would go on to the *Telegraph*, and I coaxed father till he said I might; and then I thought it wasn't square, and I got 'em to wait. I thought I'd talk with you about it, and then I knew you thought such a lot of the *Mail* I couldn't bear to. But to-day, when it was all ate up, and there isn't any money to buy any more paper, why, I said I would. You see, everybody thought it was boys' play; and it takes so long for a paper to grow up with you" —

"I'm glad you did it, Tom! You've got the makings of an editor!" said Macurdy, feeling that there could scarcely be higher praise. "And now I don't feel so bad about going away."

"Maybe we'll be editors together yet," — Tom swallowed a big lump in his throat, and Macurdy openly drew his sleeve across his eyes, — "on a bigger paper than *The 'Scutney Mail*."



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TREASURER OF THE FORESIDE CLUB.

ONE summer day, not many months after Macurdy and Jim had gone away to Texas, Tom Pickering took it into his head to attend a meeting of the Foreside Club.

"There's nothing else to do," he said; "I guess I'll have to go up and bother the girls."

Tom felt quite lost without Macurdy. He had not stayed long in the *Telegraph* office. It wasn't like being the real proprietor of a paper; indeed, it needed Macurdy's strong good sense to keep Tom out of the mischief that idle hands will sometimes do. Luella was trying her best to help him, but girls don't always make a success in discipline.

But before Tom reached the club-house—it was the dining-room at Dr. Pickering's—the 'Scutney Foreside Club was in a ferment. Indeed, it was as if a bomb had exploded under the very feet of the club when Luella Pickering, the president, said in her firmest voice, "Miss Chairman, I nominate Miss Araminta Round for treasurer of this club."



The girl from 'Scutney Corners treasurer of the Foreside Club!

Minty Round sat near the door, with her feet on the rungs of her chair, and her hands clasped about her knees—an ugly and awkward figure, tall for fifteen, but with stooping shoulders and prominent cheek-bones. Her wide mouth drooped dejectedly at the corners; only her eyes were beautiful, of no particular color, but clear and frank and eager. She wore a faded skimpy gingham dress, a cotton shawl of primitive reds and greens, and a hat whose battered condition was only emphasized by the profusion of draggled feathers and crushed flowers that adorned it; on her hands were white silk gloves, yellowed by age, and much too large for her. She started from her seat when Luella Pickering made the nomination, and a flush dyed her sharp, sallow face. There was a subdued murmur all around the room.

“Did you ever?” whispered Viola Hitchings to Polly Rawson, Bing’s sister. “It was queer enough when she was voted in; I thought the Foreside Club was going to be just ourselves. A Corners girl—an essence peddler’s daughter!”

Viola’s father kept a large store in Hebron Centre; he had just added several “departments” which made it like a city store, and Viola felt that this gave her a social position which she was bound to maintain.



"There isn't another girl in 'Scutney with such a head for figures as Minty has. I suppose that really ought to be considered a little in a treasurer," said Polly Rawson half doubtfully. Even the multiplication table was a stumbling-block to Polly Rawson, and though she had been literary editor she had a painful sense of her deficiencies.

"I don't think it's likely to require a mathematical bump to keep our accounts," said Viola with a little toss of her frowzy, tow-colored bangs; and she made a stern resolve to perform her social duty in spite of Luella Pickering. The murmur which followed Luella's nomination was succeeded by an embarrassing silence. Minty Round did not seem likely to be nominated by acclamation. Luella was growing yet more practical, and already she had acquired a peculiar staid dignity. She held her little smooth head very high, and two red spots burned upon her cheeks. The girl from 'Scutney Corners looked breathlessly and open-mouthed from face to face; she had entirely lost the self-consciousness that had made her look with half-doubting satisfaction at her gloves, and pull her skimpy skirts around her dilapidated shoes. Some of the girls were of Viola Hitchings's mind; they wondered, too, what the *'Scutney Telegraph* would think. Some thought, also, that Luella was taking too much upon herself, even if she were the founder of the club, when she tried to foist her



'Scutney Corners *protégée* upon them in that way. Ever since that girl and her father had moved from the Corners, the back settlement of 'Scutney, where the people were poor and thriftless and of doubtful morals, settling down in the little dilapidated house at the foot of the hill, Luella Pickering had made much of her.

A willow hedge bordered the grounds of Dr. Pickering, and separated them from the shabby little place where the Rounds lived ; on the dreary, early-spring day when they came there, Luella had made friends with Minty through the spiky willows.

Minty would never forget it. She knew what they thought of Corners folks at 'Scutney Fore-side. It was just like Luella to do it ; that was what every one said ; just like her also to be delighted and triumphant when Minty Round proved herself to have a quite remarkable mathematical talent, although it had been developed only in the school at the Corners, which held its sessions at those rare intervals when the boys had not burned the schoolhouse, or disabled the schoolmaster or smoked him out, or deserted in a body to go hunting or fishing or marauding.

A smooth head like Luella's suddenly appeared in the open window ; but it was a larger head, — a boy's. A pair of heavy eyebrows met above clear, quick-glancing eyes ; a good-natured mouth was parted in a grin that showed a broad expanse



of white uneven teeth. It was a strong face, but a somewhat wilful and impulsive one.

The Foreside Club frowned, for "gentlemen" were not admitted to its meetings. Nevertheless, it felt the interruption as a relief to the constrained silence.

"I should like to know who is going to keep the accounts of a girls' club?" said the boy so appositely that if his whistle had not preceded him he might have been suspected of eavesdropping. "Girls can write compositions, and tie them up with blue ribbons, and they're always picking a fellow up on grammar; but they haven't the right kind of brains for the exact sciences." The boy wagged his head seriously. "You have a girl for treasurer of your club, and your accounts will be all muddled up, and as likely as not your money lost — you'll see!"

It was Selina Craigie who turned upon the boy. "I should like to know, Tom Pickering, who is at the head of the algebra class in the Foreside school? a class that has as many boys as girls!" she cried hotly. "And who solved a problem in her head that you boys couldn't do on your slates? and made up a mathematical puzzle that was too much for the schoolmaster and the minister."

"Oh, if it comes to puzzling people, I never said!" — exclaimed the boy with a twinkle in his eyes.



"A girl who never had a chance, either, not a bit of a chance," pursued Selina, ignoring the interruption. Then she suddenly stopped short. She had not really intended to champion Minty Round's cause: she was one of those who had scarcely welcomed the girl from the Corners to the club; but she had strong views about the equality of the sexes, and a very quick temper. Long afterwards there were girls who said it was Selina Craigie's red hair that was responsible for what happened that day.

"I sha'n't be surprised if the next show that comes 'round has a lightning calculator in petticoats," said Tom Pickering, with an air of profound conviction. "And I'm sure I congratulate you on your treasurer!"

There was a great wagging of tongues, and many home truths, frankly expressed, assailed the ears of the critic as he sauntered away; but when he was really and unquestionably out of hearing, the silence that fell again was more embarrassing than before. One could have heard a pin drop in the club-room, which, as you know, was the long, low dining-room of Dr. Pickering's house. Even the lilac-scented breeze ceased to stir the great bunch of peacock feathers upon the old-fashioned secretary; the painted girl with the skipping-rope, that served as a pendulum in the tall clock case, seemed to have just stopped, with uplifted foot, to



listen ; and Minty Round, with face aflame, still stood and clasped her queerly gloved hands together in suspense.

Selina Craigie had a following, rather by reason of energy and force of character than of worldly advantages. She valued her eminence as a leader, and was careful, or at least as careful as her temperament would allow, not to jeopardize it by hasty judgments. She felt rather aghast now at what she had done, and wondered, dubiously, whether she had really committed herself to Minty Round's cause.

But she had aroused her followers' enthusiasm, and they were not hampered by her doubts, because, perhaps, they lacked the responsibility of leadership ; they were only waiting for Selina to second the nomination. But it was the voice of the girl from the Corners, harsh and strained with emotion, that broke the silence.

"I could keep the accounts well and straight, and I would keep them honest, and take care of the money. Nobody should have it without — without they walked over me, dead, to get it ! I haven't had a chance, as she said," — with a nod towards Selina. "I never expected to be so much like other girls as to belong to a club. Corners folks are — are different from you — though they ain't so bad as some folks make them out !" she added, with a flash of loyalty to her old friends. "I wouldn't want you to have me for treasurer



if you didn't want me — any of you," her voice threatened to break, but bravely held itself firm, — "but if you did!" the thin, sensitive lips quivered and compressed themselves suddenly.

"We do!" cried Selina Craigie impulsively. And "We do!" cried Selina Craigie's followers heartily — even Roberta Wing, who was supposed to wish to be the treasurer herself. The enthusiasm was contagious, as enthusiasm always is. Even Viola Hitchings found herself murmuring "We do!" and afterwards explained that people of an assured position might associate with whomsoever they chose.

Minty Round was elected treasurer of the Fore-side Club without a dissenting vote, and the radiance of her face was a sight to see. The reaction from the embarrassment and strained feeling showed itself in exuberant spirits and great freedom of discourse. The club had constituted itself the Village Improvement Society of 'Scutney, and had recently held a fair to raise funds to beautify the village. The fair had met with quite unexpected and very gratifying success, and hence the need of a treasurer for the first time in its six months of existence. After all expenses had been paid, there remained thirty-seven dollars and forty cents; and if that wasn't a very magnificent sum, it was a pretty good one for a 'Scutney fair, that had had to struggle with the difficulties that al-



ways beset a fair, and also with the impression in the community that those girls wouldn't know how to manage; so the girls were proud. With the fines and dues added, there were forty-five dollars and sixty-six cents to place in the treasurer's hands. Minty held her head high as she took the envelope containing the money from Luella's hand.

"I — I didn't tell you why I wanted so much to be treasurer," she said, and the childish delight faded from her face. "It's because I've got to carry on the business. Father's had another shock — this morning. Just as he was hoping to do something that would keep us from being so — so poor." She would not let her voice falter, and she turned an almost defiant face upon the girls.

"Did you ever! Isn't she cool?" whispered Viola Hitchings to Polly Rawson; "to come here, like this, when her father had a shock of paralysis this morning?"

"I knew 'twould encourage father, and make other folks have confidence in me. The — the firm will be 'A. Round, Herbs and Essences,' just as it was before — father's name is Aaron."

"Minty, has a doctor seen him? My father would go down" —

"Corners folks don't have doctors; they can't afford them. Father isn't the kind that would want one, anyway."

Luella felt a sudden chill of doubt. These were



such very queer people ; perhaps she would better have been kind to Minty, as some of the girls had suggested, without trying to make her one of themselves. When the girls had gone, and Minty lingered, Luella regarded a little absently and coldly the misty gratitude in her eyes, and received almost without returning the hand-clasp that had to do duty for the thanks that were choked back by a lump in Minty's throat ; a bony little grip that hand-clasp was ; for the gloves — her father's wedding ones — had been thrust into her pocket, the necessity for elegance being over. Minty went away feeling vaguely depressed, but trying to rally her drooping spirits.

"She is afraid that I won't do it well," she said to herself. "She knows they will blame her if I don't. And they thought I was queer about father — when it's all for him, if they only knew, and so I can keep our heads above water."

"There's just a chance for you — a fighting chance," said a boy's voice. It came from behind the willow hedge, whose spiky shoots were now all green and tasselled. It was Tom Pickering's voice ; he and another boy were crouched in a corner between the stumps, as if to seclude themselves from observation. Minty could see that Tom had his hand on the other boy's shoulder. His voice had ceased suddenly at the sound of footsteps.

A face peered through the greenery — the other



boy's face. Minty caught sight of it, and her heart beat quickly. The head, with a shock of rough hair that overhung the forehead, was set upon slightly humped shoulders.

"It's Archie Jewkes!" said Minty to herself in amazement. Archie was a boy from the Corners, the ringleader of a reckless gang in that disreputable neighborhood. He had been arrested for stealing a horse, and had escaped from the officers, and disappeared from the town three months before. Minty had heard only a few days before that the sheriff was still in pursuit of him. Tom Pickering stepped forth leisurely from the shadow of the trees and blew a shrill whistle.

"I've been making a willow whistle," he said easily; but there was a flush upon his face, and his eyes met hers suspiciously. "Well, have they made you a chieftess of the clan, and put all the booty into your keeping?" he added facetiously.

"I am the treasurer of the Foreside Club," returned Minty with dignity.

"Well, maybe 'twill turn out well; you have a fighting chance among those girls, as I told you. Didn't you hear me tell you that?" Tom's eyes narrowed, anxiously scrutinizing her face.

"You didn't say that to me," was on the tip of Minty's straightforward tongue, but she didn't say it.

"That's enough — if you can fight," she said lightly, as she walked on. "I guess you've got



to be all there is of you in this world, anyhow!" Tom sauntered towards the house, thinking between blasts from his whistle that that advice sounded like Macurdy's.

Where was Archie Jewkes? Minty looked back after she had passed the willow hedge; but there was no sign of him.

"More Corners folks moving in, and what 'Scutney Foreside is coming to is more than I know," said Delilah, as Tom entered the kitchen. "Jewkeses — that's what I mean; thank goodness there ain't but two of 'em now that young ruffian has run away, and is never likely to show his head in these parts again. Our folks are making so much of Corners people now, that I expect nothing but what Emmeline Jewkes will be invited here to tea 'long of the minister."

"Has she really moved here?" asked Tom, pocketing his whistle, and meditatively surveying his boots.

"Ain't I telling you?" said Delilah severely. "I looked out of the window, and saw something queer over there on Doughnut Ridge; first I thought 'twas something strayed out of the circus, like that Jim boy, or a tin peddler's wagon gone crazy. As soon as it came round the corner I found out 'twas that essence peddler's horse and wagon loaded down with old rickety furniture fit for nothing but kindling-wood; and hanging 'round



the sides of the wagon, and even on the horse, were pots and pans and kettles. I don't know but what she really has lost her balance since that boy cut up so and ran away; she fairly idolized him — poor creature!" Delilah's voice had softened suddenly; but it resumed its sharpness as she went on, —

"Perched up in front of the wagon, on top of a feather bed that was rolled up in a patchwork quilt, was Emmeline Jewkes; and dangling her long legs out behind was that young one, Fiducia, that she calls Fidy, as if she begrudged her anything as near like a Christian name as that — peaked as a witch, and with two great hollow black eyes like burnt holes in a blanket!"

"Then Minty Round knew they were coming; they're friends probably," said Tom reflectively.

"Friends! they're all one clan, Corners folks; if they quarrel among themselves, it's only just to keep their hand in when they haven't got anybody else to quarrel with."

Tom sat silent upon the chintz-covered lounge, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his gaze bent abstractedly upon the floor.

"Your father owns that old Peavy place, just a little ways up the other hill, where they've squatted," pursued Delilah; "and it's more'n likely that he's letting them have it rent free. Let folks be what they will, they've only just got



to tell him a pitiful story, and he's as soft as molasses candy. For all me, folks that haven't got spunk enough to get may go without!"

Tom had strolled out into the woodshed, but Delilah's flow of language was never dependent upon an audience. She continued to pour out her contempt for shiftless Corners folks, and her almost equal scorn of soft-hearted people who helped them; and then she slipped into the pantry, looking furtively about her, and proceeded to fill a basket generously with provisions.

"If you live with soft-hearted folks, you might as well humor them," she murmured; "and the hollow look of that young one is hard for even sensible folks to get over. The last of the boiled ham never is eaten in this house; and that rooster was middling tough, if I have got a knack of cooking them so you wouldn't hardly know it. Cream-pie isn't proper victuals for Corners folks, and I know it; but — but I should like to see that young one's eyes shine a little! A little mess of tea — for I never knew a sallow, snapping-eyed woman that didn't love it and love it strong!"

Delilah tucked her basket away until the shades of evening came. She had her own ideas about setting a good example. Meanwhile, Tom had gone, a little slyly, up into the great unfinished attic that extended all over the main body of the house. The treasures of many generations had found their



way there, most of them turned by time to useless lumber, and palled by dust ; for the doctor cringed when Delilah invaded the place with broom and scrubbing-brush. Dr. Pickering's father had also been a physician, and the inventor of certain domestic remedies which had once had great vogue in all that region ; and the old attic was half filled with bottles.

Tom rummaged behind piles of furniture and ancient trunks and packing-cases, and at length brought to light a musty feather bed and some old bedquilts. He dragged them into a corner, and arranged them, as well as he could, into a comfortable couch. Then he made a screen of a broken clothes-horse, and set it up with apparent carelessness and lack of intention before the improvised bed. "I don't suppose he'll be very fastidious, poor fellow !" he said to himself.



## CHAPTER VII.

## MINTY ASKS FOR A CHANCE.

EMMELINE JEWKES, the new arrival from 'Scutney Corners, and her ten-year-old daughter Fidy, stopped to partake of Minty Round's hospitality, the more freely offered because Minty feared that in her heart she was not glad that Emmeline had come to be her neighbor.

"I wanted to git shet of the Corners," Minty said to herself; and then resolved to be even inwardly reformed from the Corners dialect, she repeated properly, in the seclusion of her small pantry, that she wished to begin anew, and be like other people. But Minty did not permit herself to withhold even a pot of jam which Delilah had (ungraciously) presented to her.

"I don't expect your father will ever be any better," said Emmeline Jewkes, peering into the inner room as she ate. "I expect he didn't have a chance to make that medicine come right that he was in hopes to get patented?" A thinly veiled eagerness burned in her sallow face.

"The directions are not quite plain, and the



man who sent it to him got killed in a mine. He was just going to get it right." In spite of herself, tears gathered in Minty's eyes as she spoke. Some things seemed too much for even a brave heart to bear.

"Like enough you can make them out, being such a scholar," said Emmeline consolingly. "I can come and help you; my grandfather was an herb doctor. Anyhow, I can sit with your father."

"It's good of you; I guess we can help each other. Corners folks ought to," said Minty; and she said it heartily. "I'm glad Fidy isn't going to be brought up in 'Scutney Corners," she added even more heartily; "it gives you a bad name, if nothing more, and then it's hard work to make people believe in you."

"That's it!" said Emmeline Jewkes quickly. "When Monty Griggs's horse was stolen, they said of course some Corners boy was the thief. Then, just because Archie had been seen riding it, he must have stolen it. He wouldn't steal, poor lamb, any more'n I would! That's what I'm waiting and struggling for—for my Archie to come back. O Minty Round!" her shrill voice broke suddenly, and her hard face grew pitiful in its entreaty, "you do believe he'll come back, don't you?"

A vision of the face she had seen through the willow leaves arose before Minty's eyes. His mother ought to know, she thought; and yet she



dared not tell her, she was so impulsive and excitable. Perhaps it might even be her duty to tell the proper authorities; for it was true that in the background of Minty's mind there lurked a conviction that Archie Jewkes was guilty, and she was afraid, sickeningly, shrinkingly afraid for Luella's sake, that Tom Pickering, who was evidently concealing him, was guilty too.

Emmeline Jewkes naturally understood Minty's constrained silence to signify a belief that he would never return, and she wept unrestrainedly. Fidy unconcernedly ate a great deal of jam, and when she was satiated felt the need of diversion; so she went and tickled the tired old horse with a straw. Her mother silently and resentfully mounted her feather bed. Minty, filled with remorse, ran after the wagon.

"I do believe Archie will come back!" she cried. But the old wagon creaked, and the hanging things rattled, and the mother went on uncomforted.

Minty turned, to meet Tom Pickering sauntering — Tom almost always sauntered — towards her. He was whittling his willow whistle to splinters, and his forehead was tied into a very hard knot. "Mr. Bigsby has planted whole acres of buckwheat out back there," he said, jerking his head to indicate the location. "Don't you want to buy my bees? Buckwheat is good for bees."



There was unmistakable anxiety in Tom's tone. "Yes, I know I like them, and have just bought a new bee-book, — I'll throw that in, — but I've got to sell them! I have reasons" — his voice was shrill with irritation. "Well, if you must know," — Minty was sure that she had not even looked inquisitive, — "I'm hard up, desperately hard up! I almost wish father had made me stay on that newspaper."

Minty made a calculation swiftly by the aid of the mathematical bump that had astonished the Foreside school, and decided that she could not afford to buy the bees, all her available funds being needed for the legitimate business of "A. Round, Herbs and Essences." She resolutely shook her head.

"Well, some one will if you won't," Tom said, clearing his brow, and trying to speak lightly. "I've got to have money." He flushed under the gaze that Minty bent upon him, although she tried to make it indifferent. "I've got to get my bicycle repaired, and it's going to cost almost as much as a new one, and a fellow's boat-club dues" — he faltered, and then his square brows met in a scowl. "If a girl knows the multiplication table, she thinks she's awfully sharp," he said testily. "You — you saw me riding that horse of Monty Griggs's in the North 'Scutney woods the day before it was stolen; and — and, well I don't



suppose you think I'm a horse-thief, but you've been putting two and two together; that's what Luella calls it when she goes to meddling with other people's business."

"I never thought of it, until" — began Minty, and pulled herself up sharply; it was wiser not to let him know that she had seen Archie Jewkes. "I have too much addition of my own to do to attend to other people's, and — and" — Minty's hard face softened and her eyes glowed, "your sister has been too good to me for me to want to think anything bad of her brother!"

Tom laughed, drawing a quick breath that seemed like relief. "I'm used to being approved of for Luella's sake, and because I must be like her, being her twin; but when we were little they used to call us the good twin and the bad one. I'll go and see if old Mrs. Pennypacker, down on the river road, won't buy my bees." Tom threw away the remnants of his whistle, thrust his hands into his pockets, and went off.

"It isn't my business about Archie Jewkes," said Minty to herself reassuringly as she went into the house. She sent for Dr. Pickering to attend her father, with a consoling sense of being like other folks; and when the doctor shook his head and said that Mr. Round's whole right side was paralyzed, and it might be long before he recovered the use of his limbs, if he ever did, she



brought her books home from the Foreside school ; and if some tears fell on the algebra — why, it was thriftily covered with gingham, and the stain would never show.

Then she went and helped Emmeline Jewkes to set her house to rights, cautiously advancing some hints as to “nice ways,” which were not as the breath of their nostrils to Corners folks ; while Fidy, oppressed with responsibility, and only slightly fortified by more jam, sat by the sick man, and fulfilled her duty by gazing solemnly at him with her mournful black eyes.

“I can’t have that young one staring at me,” he complained, in his impressive, sepulchral whisper, when Minty returned. “If Teddy Norcross can’t come, why I’d rather be left alone.”

Teddy Norcross was one of the ‘Scutney boys, who was unable to go to school that summer on account of deafness from a hard knock in a baseball game, and just now he was generally available as an attendant on the sick man.

“Between Teddy and Emmeline Jewkes I sha’n’t have to leave him alone much,” said Minty, with resolute hopefulness.

She painted the old wagon that day, with Teddy Norcross’s help. She had found some paint in the barn, left by a former occupant of the house. When the brown gave out they used the blue, and when there wasn’t enough of that, the green and



the red; and Teddy said the effect just suited him. And when the lettering was done — why, if the letters were not exactly even, at least they didn't look stiff, as Teddy said, and certainly any one could read them, which, as Minty stoutly averred, was the principal thing.

“Folks will see you're coming a good ways off, and that will help the business,” said Teddy sagely.

Nevertheless, the gay wagon haunted Minty's dreams; she feared that it would bring disrespect upon the Foreside Club. “Some of those girls won't like to see me 'round peddling, anyhow, when I'm their treasurer,” she said to herself. “I guess I have only got a fighting chance amongst them at the best. But the business must come first, for we've got to live.”

The supply of poultry seasoning was exhausted. It was a compound invented by the essence peddler, and very popular among his customers. Minty's first duty was to make a new supply, and she accepted Emmeline Jewkes's offer to come and help her make it. They worked all the forenoon, in the great unfinished back kitchen, which was very convenient as a laboratory. They took the savory herbs from the essence peddler's carefully labelled packages, mixed them, and put them up in little tin boxes, while Fidy ran constantly to the bedroom door to gaze solemnly at the sick man, until he irritably ordered the door shut.



"There's something wearing on your father's mind," remarked Emmeline, pausing in her work of sifting herbs to speak impulsively. "It makes him real peevish. You don't expect it's that medicine that he'd come so near to making a success of?"

"Yes," said Minty; "that's it. I'm going to try to make it, after I get the business well in hand."

"I expect you've got the — the recipe," said Emmeline, sifting softly, with her face turned away.

"He's got it — father has; he doesn't like to let even me look at it. I guess anybody would have hard work to get it away from him, even if he was asleep. He thinks he shall be able to try it again soon — poor father!" Minty's gingham apron went hastily across her eyes, so she did not catch the expression of Emmeline Jewkes's face.

"Some folks have all the chance — nothing ever comes my way," said Emmeline Jewkes to herself.

Whether it was caused by Emmeline Jewkes's disturbance of mind, or Fidy's meddling fingers, or Teddy Norcross's effervescent spirits, — Teddy was helping, — Minty did not know; but that day a blunder was made which was a great misfortune to the business of "A. Round, Herbs and Essences."



Old Mrs. Pennypacker — the keeper of bees on the river road — entertained the minister from Mill Creek and his wife at dinner; and she had her gray goose killed to furnish forth the feast. The goose was ancient; but old Mrs. Pennypacker cooked it by a famous recipe, warranted to make a tough fowl tender, and she bought a box of poultry seasoning of Minty, wherewith to make it savory. The gray goose had been a sacrifice that brought tears to the eyes of old Mrs. Pennypacker; but she was poor, and determined to do honor to the minister, and hold up her head amongst folks, as she tearfully explained to Dr. Pickering. Everyone who partook of the gray goose was so ill as to need Dr. Pickering's services!

Old Mrs. Pennypacker was overwhelmed with despair, in the belief that it was the gray goose's toughness that had caused the trouble; but when Mrs. Elias Putney of Doughnut Ridge, who had roast chicken for dinner, was forced to send for Dr. Pickering to attend all her family, and the Peterbys in Apple Lane fell ill after eating roast turkey, — unseasonably, according to 'Scutney ideas, and because their gobbler's disposition had made him unendurable, — then, of course, suspicion, that was almost certainty, fell upon Minty's poultry seasoning. People had bought largely of it on the first morning when she drove around in the gayly painted wagon. She had recommended it as



fresh stock ; and many who sympathized with and wanted to help her, had bought it as something that they were sure to need some time. All over 'Scutney, at the Centre, the Crossroads, and the Foreside, there was a panic about the poultry seasoning, whose manufacture and sale were Minty's first individual efforts in the business line !

Dr. Pickering analyzed the seasoning, and found in it lobelia — not deadly by any means, but likely to cause nausea in large quantities or in certain combinations.

Minty went around and collected her boxes, returning the money. She held her head high, and there were bright spots on her cheek-bones ; the hot tears smarted in her eyes, but did not fall. She could not explain or apologize ; the great lump in her throat forbade. She could not take the matter lightly, and act as if it were not much of anything, as Tom Pickering sagaciously advised. Tom had come down on purpose to sympathize with her, it appeared ; she came home, and found that he had taken Teddy Norcross's place, giving Teddy a longed-for opportunity to go fishing. He was dangling his long legs from the window seat, and using a palm-leaf fan to keep the flies from the essence peddler, who was sleeping. He did it as patiently and tenderly as a woman. There were very nice things about Tom, Minty thought gratefully, especially considering that he was, as Luella



said, every inch a boy. But while that affair of Archie Jewkes and the stolen horse, together with Tom's pressing need of money, remained a mystery, she didn't think she should care much about his business advice. Luella came down soon after Tom had gone, — Luella, with two little sharp puckers on her smooth brow that made her look like Tom. Minty darkened the room where her father still slept, and the two girls went out on the porch and talked things over. Luella was very sympathetic; she held Minty's hard and sharp-knuckled little hand in her smooth and soft one, and tried to cheer her.

"I think it shows that it isn't the thing for a girl to do, Minty," she said firmly. "To drive a horse and wagon like that doesn't seem exactly womanly; and people won't have confidence in you in a business way, just because you're a girl. They wouldn't, even if this hadn't happened; and to take care of the horse—that is dreadful!" A delicate little shiver of disgust proved the depth of Luella's disapproval.

"Teddy Norcross helps me," said Minty faintly.

"The girls don't like the wagon," said Luella frankly. "Of course your belonging to the club, and being an officer too, does make a difference."

Minty murmured a vague assent; her heart was growing heavier and heavier, and the spots on her cheeks redder and redder.



“Your father needs you at home, and—and we’re planning to have a fair for your benefit! Of course we can’t expect to do quite as well as if people hadn’t just spent so much on the other fair, but we think every one will want to help you.”

Minty held her head very erect now, and her face burned from brow to chin. “I can help myself!” she cried; and her voice was shrill with the sob that she restrained. “As long as I can help myself, I don’t want anybody to help me. You mean real well, you and the other girls; and I don’t want to make you ashamed. But after I had been helped once, then I should have to be helped again—don’t you see? There are father and me to be supported. And I can do it! I have got a business bump, if I did make that blunder—you’ll see! I didn’t want to be that kind of a girl, to drive ’round and sell things; I would have liked to be a nice girl, with stylish hair and a sash, and pretty white hands; and I don’t think about what girls have a right to do, like Selina Craigie; and I wanted to go to school—oh, how I did want to learn! But when things look as if they were meant for me to do, I can’t give in. I ain’t a-goin’ to lop onto other folks!” When she was carried out of herself by strong feeling, Minty insensibly dropped into the vernacular of the Corners. Luella drew her hand across her



forehead in a perplexed fashion ; it was a narrower forehead than Tom's, and had a delicate tracery of blue veins.

"You don't think it's any harm to drive your pony," pursued Minty wistfully ; "and lots of girls sell things ; and I know how to make the essences and things. I do, if that dreadful thing did happen ! Just let me have a chance, and don't get people to help me, and see if I don't make you and the other girls stop being ashamed of me !"

"Well—if that is the way you feel," said Luella, rising to go ; she had the gently cold and absent manner that seemed to be natural to her at times. But she turned back from the doorway with her soft blue eyes misty with trouble. "You know I'll stand by you, Minty—all I can," she said.

As she walked homeward, Luella came very near to regretting her championship of the girl from the Corners. She was sensitive to the disapproval of the other girls, and the thought that she had been the means of bringing disgrace upon the club was extremely painful. There was a funny side to poor Minty's trouble. Old Mrs. Penny-packer's gray goose had become a standing joke, and the club didn't like to be connected with a laughing-stock !

Luella had the natural lack of a cared-for young



girl of comprehension of every-day needs ; indeed, this belongs to some temperaments in any circumstances, so she did not see why Minty and her father could not get along without that dreadful peddling, especially with a fair to help them out. She felt that Minty was most unpleasantly obstinate. Perhaps Polly Rawson's mother was right in saying that Minty probably had not a fine nature. Perhaps Delilah was right when she reminded her what the Scriptures said you couldn't make a silk purse out of ! If she had it to do over again, Luella said to herself, — she was tired and dispirited, and she even went so far as that, — she wasn't sure that she wouldn't let Corners people alone. Tom was worrying her just now. She had felt a great responsibility about Tom since Macurdy Green had gone away, and Tom was not at all like himself ; he had something on his mind, as Delilah had observed. He was moody and irritable ; and he went on long, mysterious expeditions, refusing resentfully to give any account of himself. And he had borrowed all her money, her month's allowance, and seemed to have no intention of paying. Tom borrowed always, as the sparks fly upward ; but he had always before been sure to pay.

When a girl had the responsibility of being sister — twin sister — to a boy with a busy father and no mother, a boy whom sometimes there was no



accounting for, she hadn't much time for benevolent interest in other people! And when Luella reached home in this mood, there was a deputation of girls waiting for her, to see what was going to be done about that peddling 'Scutney Corners girl, whose name was in everybody's mouth, and whom they had elected treasurer of their club.

Of course a fair would be an agreeable excitement, and it would make people understand that they were helping the girl, rather than associating with her; but she didn't want the fair? she wouldn't be helped in that way? Horrors! what were they going to do with her? Viola Hitchings said that she had never seen any reason why they should have her in the club, any more than the daughters of the washerwoman, Mrs. Hickey.

"She wants to make something of herself, and the Hickey girls don't," explained Luella. "It seems like pushing drowning people back to see a girl struggling to—to be a lady and not help her." Luella spoke with unwonted vehemence, but she paused suddenly; it occurred to her that it was doubtful whether just what Minty wanted was to be a lady.

"I think we shall have to ask her to resign," said Viola Hitchings, who felt that her argument of the Hickey girls was an invulnerable one.

"If her own good feeling doesn't prompt her to do it," added Roberta Wing.



"I wish she would resign," was on the tip of Luella's tongue; but Minty's wistful face arose before her; she remembered her promise to stand by her if she could.

"I think we ought to give her a chance," she said; and Polly Rawson agreed with her.

But the deputation generally went away dissatisfied. They didn't see what chance there was for a girl like that. After that trial was over, Luella went into the kitchen, only to hear Delilah grumbling about Corners folks.

"She's been here peeking 'round and asking questions, Emmeline Jewkes has. These soft-hearted people, like your father, do a sight of mischief. Of course I had to carry her some victuals: your father would have been flinging at me that I hadn't any feeling for poor folks, or was too lazy to cook a little mite extra, if I hadn't; and then up she comes to see what more she can get. I stood right in the pantry door so she couldn't get in there; and she went out into the woodshed, poking 'round among the bottles. 'If it's bottles you want,' says I, 'there's a cartload of them up garret.' She colored up as if I'd accused her of stealing; and, 'What did she want of bottles?' says she. 'Oh,' says I, 'I thought maybe you wanted them for that girl to put up her stuff in that's poisoning everybody.' She said she hadn't any thing to do with that girl, — that's what she's said



ever since there was such a fuss about that seasoning, — but she didn't know but she should set up a business on her own account, seeing her grandfather was an herb doctor. 'Business!' says I contemptuous. 'Time was when women-folks were satisfied to go out washing or take in sewing.' When one of our hens sets out to crow, — kind of shrill and wheezy, like a rooster with something stuck in his throat, — why, I have 'Lias chop her head off, for I know she'll never be good for anything."

"Emmeline Jewkes went away laden," said Luella, a faint twinkle appearing in her troubled eyes.

The color was slightly heightened upon Delilah's cheek-bones. "If the folks you work for are bound to encourage the shiftless, why you ain't accountable; and I don't suppose that hollow-looking young one ever had a taste of frosted cake before."

Meanwhile, Minty was facing her future resolutely, even though she could not keep her heart from heaviness.

"If I could succeed in spite of the poultry seasoning, if 'A. Round, Herbs and Essences,' was the most prosperous firm in its line in the country, why then how differently people would think of me!" she said to herself sagely.

She had a vision of great gaudy and gilded vans, with prancing steeds, replacing the rickety old wagon with its harlequin paint; she only di-



rected their movements and the work done in a great laboratory ; her father was strong and well, cured by prosperity, and all the skill that money could buy ; she wore pink sashes — very wide — every day, and her hair was stylish, and there were lace curtains in her windows, — one need not stop at anything in a dream ; the girls boasted that she was treasurer of the Foreside Club ; Luella was proud of her ! Minty brushed the bright vision aside suddenly, not being of those

“who with a slackened will  
Dream of things past or things to be.”

“I’ll try to make that medicine that cures everybody’s cough. I’ll get father to let me take the prescription again, and see if I can’t make out the writing. Perhaps I can take it out from under his pillow now that he is asleep.”

It was likely to be a difficult undertaking, as she had told Emmeline Jewkes. The peddler’s mind seemed centred upon the care of that bit of paper. But he was sleeping heavily now — more soundly than he had slept since his attack ; and it was better for her to take it in that way if she could, because the doctor had warned her against talking with him about anything that would agitate him. He stirred when she slipped her hand softly under his pillow. She had placed the money of the Foreside Club in this hiding-place, as well as the medi-



cal formula, deciding it to be the safest place in the house, after lying awake almost all of one night because the money was in her father's old trunk with a broken lock; and hurrying home one day, with her route uncompleted, because it was in a drawer of their one bureau, which had no locks. On that last occasion she had placed it between her feather bed and straw mattress, but had afterwards felt that it would be safest in the hiding-place which her father was absorbed in guarding because of his own treasure concealed there. She waited until he was quiet, and again slipped her hand under the pillow. She drew forth an envelope, and found the formula in it. But she had felt only one envelope; and she slipped her hand under the pillow again, her heart beginning to beat quickly with apprehension. Her father started up, and fell back with a look of angry alarm, which only partially left his face as he recognized her.

Minty pulled the pillow aside frantically, felt between the mattresses, and peered under the bed. The envelope containing the club's money was gone!

"Minty, Minty! what makes you look so?" whispered her father huskily. "That long-legged fellow — the doctor's son — didn't steal the medicine directions, did he?"



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE MISSING FUNDS.

“**N**O, no, father! your paper is safe — see!” Minty held up the medical formula reassuringly, and the sick man lay back upon his pillow with a look of relief upon his worn face. “But — but what made you think that Tom Pickering had taken it?”

“He’s been here when you’ve been away, straddling the table and staring at me, sending Teddy Norcross off fishing, — who knows what he wants? And when there’s anything so valuable as that paper ’round, it isn’t safe to let everybody in. I went to sleep, didn’t I? Though I didn’t mean to till you came home. I don’t want those boys ’round, any of them. You and I will get along alone, Minty, until I get able to make that medicine!”

Minty hesitated to tell him of her loss. She had told him what she had hidden under his pillow with the other envelope; but the fund of a girls’ club had evidently seemed of but little consequence to him compared to the treasure that was to bring



him fortune, and he had altogether forgotten it. But it would agitate him to know of her loss, at least because it would make him feel that his precious bit of paper was not safe. So she constrained herself to silence, and kept her white face averted from her father's eyes, and tried to steady her trembling hands when she gave him his food.

When she had bolstered him up with pillows, to eat his dinner, she made another search for the missing envelope, under pretence of arranging the bed. It was all in vain. The money was not to be found. As soon as her domestic duties would allow, she went out on the porch, where she had sat with Luella, and tried to face this new disaster like a girl who must have courage — and who had a mathematical bump.

It was entirely unlikely that any one had been there, except Teddy Norcross, possibly Fidy Jewkes, and — Tom Pickering. Minty said that name to herself with a little shiver of dread. As soon as she became aware of her loss she had felt the shadow of that suspicion, and refused to admit it to herself. Her father's instant distrust of Tom had shocked her; and yet even before he had expressed it she knew she had thought of Tom's unexplained presence there, and of his declared need of money. Tom had associated, more than any one at the Foreside knew, with the Corners boys. Perhaps that was the very root of the suspicion.



Teddy Norcross was tried and true in the matter of honesty. His father's reputation in 'Scutney was like that of the honest blacksmith in the song. Under Fidy Jewkes's preternaturally solemn demeanor lurked tricky impulses, but she would be likely to be honest. Minty had always heard that Emmeline was, and Corners people knew each other.

Even as she thought of her, Fidy's spidery little figure swung itself over a stone wall into Minty's bean patch. There was a short cut down the hill, hampered only by two stump fences and a stone wall, delights to Fidy, whose tastes were acrobatic. Fidy was dazzlingly clean, — an unwonted condition, — and arrayed in pink calico and a brilliantly beribboned new hat, and she carried a gingham bag with a book in it.

"See me!" she cried breathlessly. "I go to school. I began this morning. Phippsy Towle, the milkman, carried me with his cans; now I'm going to walk."

"Then you were not down here this morning?" said Minty involuntarily. Emmeline, she knew, had been to Hebron to see if she could get work to take home from the stocking-factory.

"Of course I wasn't. I can't stop to fool now I go to school," returned Fidy with importance, as she tramped ruthlessly through the beans, — another short cut.



Before long Teddy Norcross came up from the river with a fine string of perch. Teddy's cherubic sun-burned face glowed with a fisherman's honest pride; it wore no trace of guilt. If Teddy could be guilty of anything worse than a boyish prank, Mother Nature had stamped him deceitfully. Perhaps she does that sometimes, or else our eyes are unskilled to read her warnings; but Minty knew that Teddy was not the one. That was what she said to herself. And the two envelopes had been there when she went away in the morning. She had made sure of that, as she always did, when she arranged her father's pillows the very last thing.

"Teddy! Teddy! did you stay with father all the time?" she called after the boy, whom she had scarcely thanked for the generous share of his fish that he had bestowed upon her.

"All the time until Tom Pickering came. He didn't go to school because he had a headache. He made me go fishing; he said he could stay just as well as not," said Teddy, stoutly defending himself from the possible accusation of neglect.

The meetings of the Foreside Club were held fortnightly; the first one since her election as treasurer was to be held the following day. What would happen when she should give the disgraceful account of her stewardship? All the hard possibilities arose before Minty's mental vision. Would they believe her, and would suspicion fall



on Tom? Would the theft be brought home to him? No, no; anything but that — anything to herself! She hugged her knees tightly with her clinched hands, sitting, a queer, stubborn little figure, on the three-legged stool in the dilapidated porch, holding back the tears from her smarting eyes as she looked over her struggling little garden, and the unsympathetic sunshiny blue of the distant river and sky.

“She tried to give me a chance; nobody else ever did or would. If it don’t come to anything, if I ain’t ever anything but Corners folks, if they say I’m a thief, and put me in prison — why, I’ll never let anything hurt Luella!”

This was an exalted, an heroic mood — scarcely any one is so poor-spirited as not to know such! Was there staying power behind it for the cruel days of undeserved disgrace and defeat?

“I must do the best I can, for father’s sake; he comes first. But they say her father is afraid Luella has a weak heart, like her mother, and she is bound up in Tom; it would kill her to know.”

Then the practical nature of the girl, who, with scarcely any training, was the best mathematician in the Foreside school, asserted itself. “He can’t be bad clear through — Luella’s brother. I’ll try to make him give it back!”

A ray of hope came with this resolve, as hope always comes to an energetic nature with the idea



of something to be done. But when she came to think of it, there were difficulties about trying to make Tom restore the money! Of course he would be furiously angry, or behave as if he were, at the mere suggestion of her suspicion. He would tell Luella, and it would be only natural that Luella should believe him. The club girls, too, would believe him — who would not, since there was no proof, but only the word of a girl from the Corners against his? If Luella should not believe him, if she should suspect that he had taken it — why, that would be worst of all! Mathematical brains seemed to offer no help in this trouble, and poor Minty's were almost distracted. When she went on her route the next morning, the coldness with which people greeted her, and their general refusal to buy her wares, — having that little matter of the poultry seasoning still fresh in their minds, — scarcely added to the heaviness of her heart; and when, late in the afternoon, she went up to Dr. Pickering's to the club meeting, she was still unable to decide upon any plan of action. She was a straightforward soul, but she was willing to temporize now. She hoped that nothing would be said about the money that would force her to confess that she had lost it. But the very first business that came before the meeting, as the president announced in a precise and important manner, was the consideration



of the proper disposal of the club's funds! And poor Minty grew sick and cold with dread.

There were found to be differences of opinion, and an animated discussion arose. Some of the girls thought they should be public-spirited, and spend the money upon the adornment of the public library grounds at 'Scutney Centre, while others were strongly in favor of beginning at home, and ornamenting the grounds of the new Foreside schoolhouse, or giving the money towards the purchase of a bell for the Foreside chapel. The treasurer took no part in the discussion; most of the girls looked at her askance, or ignored her entirely. If they showed such strong feeling because she had allowed lobelia to get into her poultry seasoning, and painted her old wagon in too many colors, what would they do when they knew the worst? thought Minty.

While the debate was at its height, Tom Pickering leaned in at the window, as he had done on the day when the treasurer was elected. Tom was a favorite; and, although the girls made a pretence of driving him away, he stayed, and was useful in keeping down a threatening heat in the discussion by his jocular interpolations and suggestions. But Tom lacked his usual spirits to-day, — any one could see that, — and his wit was a little labored. His boyish face looked worn, and the queer little pucker was constantly between his brows.



"I'll tell you what to do!" he exclaimed suddenly, after a suggestion that the money should be offered as a prize for the best essay on bee-keeping or colt-raising, which he declared he should be sure to win. "Give it to me to invest for you! I have a famous business bump; if you don't believe it, see how well I've done with my bees, when old Mrs. Pennypacker said hers died in debt for their rent."

Minty had turned involuntarily, and given him a swift glance. As he met it, his face crimsoned, although he went on talking with apparent unconcern. After a moment he looked at her again defiantly. "The treasurer looks as if she didn't want me to have it," he said. "Maybe she thinks she has a better business bump herself." A slight, suppressed titter ran around the room, followed by an embarrassed pause. How could they help thinking of the unfortunate poultry seasoning?

"You haven't said what you thought we ought to do with the money, Minty," said Luella, with a blazing indignation in her gentle face.

"It was mean to say that, but I didn't think," murmured Tom penitently for Luella's ear. "All the same, she mustn't look at me like that, right before everybody!" he added to himself.

"You helped so much about the fair too," pursued Luella; "and your father gave us those nice essences that sold so well."





MINTY HAD TURNED INVOLUNTARILY, AND GIVEN HIM  
A SWIFT GLANCE.







When Luella's righteous indignation was aroused she forgot that she had almost wished that she had never troubled herself about that girl from the Corners. Minty held her head up; loyalty to Luella demanded that she should not make her more ashamed of her than was inevitable, but the lump in her throat would not let her speak. That fair had been the one good time of her life; she had joyfully reckoned it as the beginning of her chance — and now!

Selina Craigie came to the rescue with a bright idea. She proposed that they should keep the money until fall, and then give a concert, by which they might raise sufficient additional funds to buy the chapel bell "all themselves."

There was an unusual degree of musical talent in the club. Polly Rawson could play the violin more than passably; Selina Craigie had a knack with the banjo; Stella Crary was in training for a professional pianist; and little fat Abby Atwood, who was a dunce at school, had a voice like a bobolink. The Foreside boys would help, even if they did have their own opinion of girls' clubs; and some of them had a minstrel talent, and Orrin Seaver was a fine elocutionist. It was soon settled that the Foreside could cover itself with glory, and buy the bell; and the treasurer was directed to deposit the funds in the 'Scutney savings-bank until they should be needed for the concert.



"Some one ought to go with her to the bank; she might go in her wagon! how funny it would look," whispered Viola Hitchings, when the meeting was breaking up, and the girls were gathered into groups.

"I think some one ought to have the care of the bank-book. What will she know about it?" said Roberta Wing, whose cousin was a clerk in the bank.

Minty ran away without a word to any one. She drew a long, sobbing breath of relief as she ran. It was a reprieve; there was a possibility that she might earn the money, and replace it before its loss was discovered! But there would be questions asked about the depositing of the money; they would probably wish to see the bank-book. Minty knew that there were such things as bank-books. Lycurgus Tribble at the Corners always boasted, when he had been drinking, that he had once possessed one; but no one believed that he had. It was the simple Corners policy to spend your money if you had any. If only any one but Tom Pickering had taken the money! It would be the straightforward, honest way to tell of the loss; and in every drop of her blood Minty loved the honest, straightforward way.

Emmeline Jewkes was waiting for her at her gate; Teddy Norcross had received strict orders to admit no visitors in her absence.



"I should have liked a chance to rest my weary bones, but that young one wouldn't let me in any more'n if I was p'ison," said Emmeline resentfully. "It don't seem real neighborly to treat folks so. There — there ain't any reason more'n common, is there?" Emmeline gazed at her furtively, narrowing her snapping eyes keenly.

"Father thinks people stare at him," said Minty evasively. She dismissed Teddy Norcross, and invited Emmeline, absently, to come in. While she stood in the doorway, Tom Pickering sauntered towards the gate. Minty's face flamed; she drew Emmeline in hurriedly, and shut the door almost in Tom's face.

"Well, I declare!" gasped Emmeline Jewkes.

"I — I didn't feel as if I could stand him just now. I'm all worked up about something," faltered Minty, whose sturdy self-control was on the verge of giving way.

"I supposed you thought a sight of the doctor's folks. He hasn't been doing anything you don't like, has he?"

There were queer reddish sparks in Emmeline's dark eyes; her face was sharp with eagerness.

"It has worried me about the poultry seasoning, and — and belonging to the club is kind of wearing, when they're so different, and I've made them ashamed of me — and I didn't feel just like talking to Tom."



Minty was not good at subterfuges; Emmeline's face grew only more eager and inquisitive.

"Tom Pickering used to come out to the Corners; they said his father didn't like to have him go with the Corners boys; but I guess they're as good as he is. He and my Archie appeared to take a great fancy to one another. I suppose 'twas because they both thought so much of dumb creatures. Now, I kind of think he led Archie into mischief."

"I always thought Archie was honest," said Minty slowly. "I knew he was inclined to be wild and reckless, but I thought he was honest."

"And you know Tom Pickering ain't!" cried Emmeline in sudden excitement. "I know he ain't, but I wa'n't going to tell you how I knew it till I'd made up my mind what to do about it!"

Minty clasped her hands around her knees, and regarded Emmeline with a pitiful anxiety in her small, sharp-featured face.

"I ain't one that tells all they know," pursued Emmeline; "and, besides, though you appear friendly, I hain't never got a real nearness to you, Minty Round! You'd rather be Foreside folks than Corners folks, and you'd rather associate with them! But seeing you appear to have found out what Tom Pickering is, I may as well tell you what I know. I was down in the woods by the river, 'long back of old Mrs. Pennypack-



er's" — Minty winced a little at the name; old Mrs. Pennypacker's little granddaughter had made faces at her through the picket fence, and hooted after her as she went by, ever since that affair of the gray goose. "I was after goldthread, — Fidy's got canker in her mouth, — and I thought as long as I was there I'd go down to the edge of the swamp to see if there was any lobelia that I could get, come September; there's nothing like lobelia for coughs and colds.

"Old Mrs. Pennypacker was down in her pumpkin patch; and she called after me, 'You'd better not go near that old barn on Dr. Pickering's farm down by the woods,' says she. 'The man that lived there disappeared and never was heard from, and there are dreadful queer noises there. I heard 'em once myself when I was hunting a stray turkey, 'long on the edge of the evening.'

"'I've lived amongst 'Scutney Corners folks. If I can stand them, I guess I needn't be afraid of ghosts,' says I; and I kept right along. I didn't expect to hear a thing, for I've heard tell of ghosts before! And at first I didn't; but pretty soon there came a kind of a knocking — knocking, inside of that old barn! It's right down on the edge of the woods, you know, a lonesome place, where scarcely anybody ever goes; and for a minute I felt kind of creepy. But I've had too much wrangling with flesh and blood to be afraid of my shadow,



and I was bound I'd get what I'd come for. Besides, I got kind of curious to hear the noise again. I went a little nearer to the barn, and when the noise came again 'twas a kicking. Thinks I, I don't know much about the ways of ghosts ; but if that ain't a horse, I'm beat !”



## CHAPTER IX.

## MINTY'S SORE TRIAL.

MINTY still clasped her knees and leaned forward, listening intently. "I went up to the barn window," Emmeline continued; "but 'twas covered with an old linen carriage-duster so close that there wa'n't a chink to peek through. And 'twas as still as death! I began to think I'd come away without the goldthread. You take it right near dark, lonesome woods, and after hearing such foolish stories, and the most sensible are apt to feel crinkly down their spinal columns. I was going away, — kind of fast, I will own, — when there came a horse's neigh from the barn, just as natural and cheerful sounding a neigh as ever you heard! I went back, and tried to peek in at every nook and cranny of that old barn to see that horse. I couldn't see it; but I knew well enough — it seemed to come to me like a flash when I heard the neigh — that 'twas Monty Griggs's horse that Tom Pickering had stolen and hid there! And here he is strutting around like a cock-turkey, with his hands in his pockets, while my poor in-



nocent lamb is being hunted by sheriffs all over the country!"

Emmeline's metaphors might be mixed, but her motherly indignation was genuine and impressive. Minty was silent, a wave of color rising slowly over her anxious face.

"You ain't going to doubt it now, after — after you've found out what that fellow is?" cried Emmeline angrily.

Minty hesitated. She felt as if she ought to tell Emmeline that Tom was protecting and concealing her son; but she feared the consequences, knowing Emmeline's excitable nature. Moreover, she was too worn out and bewildered to trust herself to decide what to do.

"If the horse is there, it can be proven that Archie is innocent, and he — he can come home," she said slowly. There was so much sympathy in her face and tone that Emmeline was appeased.

"I suppose they could say it wa'n't that horse," she said reflectively. "I know well enough that it's going to be hard for folks from the Corners to hold their own against the Pickerings."

"And I can't afford to quarrel with the doctor's folks — just yet," she added to herself on her homeward way. She had found Minty unsatisfactorily non-committal, and had soon taken herself away. "That old-maid hired girl has got a disposition just as crinkly as her hair, and she's



all one with them in feeling. You've got to pretend you think a sight of them, and ain't found out that she's kind-hearted, to get her to help you!" Emmeline's sallow face wore an unwonted flush, and its weak outlines were almost lost in an expression of grim resolution. "I ain't going to heave away what it appears as if Providence had thrown in my way!" she said to herself. "And one of these days, if I can make things turn out as I expect to, — and I've got doctoring talent, I know I have, being so much like grandfather, — why, I'll take Minty Round into partnership, and there sha'n't any Foreside folks look down on her or me! I'll get my poor lamb home, and prove to folks that he ain't a thief, — but O land of mercies! I hain't got him! I hain't got him!"

Her hard face broke like an ice pool in a sudden thaw, and her features worked convulsively like a crying child's. "Poor struggling Corners folks, fighting for their only son," she murmured, with the self-pity which is apt to be the strongest emotion of a weak nature in misfortune, "the Lord ain't going to be hard on them!"

Minty started up suddenly from her deep reflection a few minutes after Emmeline had gone.

"She mustn't tell of Tom! I must persuade her not to tell — for Luella's sake!" Minty made one bound down the steps on her way — Fidy's way, across lots — to Emmeline Jewkes's. But



she stopped suddenly, clinching her hands tightly as if to hold herself back. "I couldn't persuade her. And she ought not to let Tom escape and her son be hunted as a thief!"

'Scutney Corners had its own standards of right; a reckless loyalty was one of them. Even Minty's clear eyes were in danger of being blinded by the Corners atmosphere, through which they had always seen life. "And I can't tell her that I saw Archie and Tom together! Tom must do it when she accuses him — if I wasn't dreaming, as sometimes I almost think I was! It seems like Emmeline to be in a hurry to accuse him — but she doesn't seem to be."

Early the next morning, however, Minty saw Emmeline Jewkes going up the hill to Dr. Pickering's. Emmeline walked resolutely, indeed with a martial stride, which she sometimes assumed, and did not turn her head.

"Now she is going to tell Dr. Pickering about the horse," thought Minty, with a throb of anxiety. But Minty was mistaken. Emmeline did not ask for Dr. Pickering. She opened the screen door of the kitchen, and made her way unannounced into the cool and fragrant little dairy, through whose window she had espied Delilah. The last pat of butter had just taken on a red-clover stamp under Delilah's deft hand; but Delilah did not greet her visitor over-cordially. The



widow's peak, which Tom declared to be the most expressive feature of Delilah's face, seemed to rise higher into the crinkles of her hair, and her nostrils expanded in a faint but expressive sniff. Delilah had her own opinion of Corners people, as we know; and, moreover, she declared that she didn't know what to make of Emmeline Jewkes, — she wasn't flesh nor fowl nor good red herring. Emmeline's manner on this occasion was ingratiating.

"I've made up my mind that I will take some of those bottles, seeing you're so kind as to offer them," she said. "I won't trouble you any; if you'll let me go right up into the attic I'll pick out the sizes that I want. I — I'm thinking of putting up some medicine."

Delilah started; her large, swarthy cheeks were slowly stained with a brilliant carmine. She turned and looked keenly at Emmeline.

"She ain't sharp to see through folks; crinkly hair and considerable fat don't ever mean that," said Emmeline to herself shrewdly. "Anyhow, she couldn't know that I was after the old doctor's recipe for cough medicine, for I haven't breathed it to a soul." And Emmeline bore the keen scrutiny well. Delilah drew a long breath.

"Oh, la! there's bottles enough in the woodshed," she said easily; "and just the same shapes and sizes that there are up garret."

"I only thought maybe they'd be kind of dusty



out there, and not so many to pick from," said Emmeline meekly. "'Twas you that mentioned my going up into the attic after them."

"I'll fetch you down a whole lot," said Delilah quickly. "'Tisn't a fit place for anybody to go into, for the doctor won't have things meddled with up there, and he shivers if I go near them with a broom; so the dust just collects."

"If that's so, I'll just take a few out of the woodshed," said Emmeline, in a tone that conveyed only a slight sense of injury. She stepped quickly into the woodshed, and threw a door and window wide; the snapping eyes were near-sighted, and Emmeline had been told that old Dr. Pickering had been accustomed to label his famous cough sirup with all its ingredients, lest its appearance might resemble that of the patent remedies which his professional soul abhorred.

Delilah hurried out, freely expressing housewifely anxiety lest the unscreened window which Emmeline had opened should let in the flies, and officiously taking down bottles, giving Emmeline no time to examine their labels. Emmeline remarked, with chilly humility, that she would only take a few; they didn't appear to be exactly what she wanted.

"She's after something more'n bottles!" said Delilah to herself, watching from her dairy window the gaunt figure, whose plaid-shawled, stooping



back was expressive of a kind of resentful patience to Delilah's already sore conscience. "But there! maybe some things are making me over-suspicious — I never was any hand at hiding and deceiving — and her cheeks are as hollow as her young one's eyes — and a pat from a churning we never shall miss. Here, Emmeline Jewkes!" she called, and Emmeline walked slowly back to the window. "They say June butter's wholesomer than any other," said Delilah gruffly, handing out one of her dainty clover-stamped pats folded in a Japanese napkin.

"I ain't one that asks favors, but, when they're offered" — said Emmeline, dealing a small stab as she took the butter. She turned abruptly away, going across the lawn with her nervous, jerking gait more pronounced than usual.

"It's the doctor's butter, and his doings, as you might say," murmured Delilah; "for I ain't one to heave away good victuals on such shiftless folks. Anyhow, she didn't get into that attic, and she won't!"

Emmeline's nervous excitement carried her home so fast that she panted heavily, and leaned against the rail that did duty for a gate before her humble dwelling.

"I'm going to get into that attic!" she said to herself with grim resolution. "There ain't anybody crinkly haired and fat can keep me out!"



Meanwhile, Minty had gone on her route with a ray of hope lighting her darkness. She could not make out the obscure names in that medical formula which her father's friend had sent him to make his fortune with; but she had, by dint of much logic and persuasion, gained her father's consent to her plan of submitting the formula to the Hebron druggist, that he might decipher it, if possible, and advise and perhaps help them about getting a patent, and putting the medicine upon the market. The essence peddler had felt as if a precious secret were being wrested from him, and had needed much persuasion; but his respect for Minty's business bump, together with a sense of his own helplessness, finally prevailed.

Minty took the direct road to Hebron, feeling this business to be most important, and deferring all her selling for her homeward way.

"Oh, are you carrying our money to the bank?" It was Roberta Wing's voice from the sidewalk that broke in upon a delightful vision, in which Minty had seen the club's money restored, and herself the maker and proprietor of a cough medicine that made people quite forget the poultry seasoning, or that she had ever been a girl of 'Scutney Corners. "You get my cousin to do the business for you! He will, because he knows I belong to the club, and it may save you time; it's a pretty busy place in bank hours."



Roberta Wing's sense of importance in having a cousin in the bank, and knowing all about it, had made her too eager to wait for a response to her question.

Yet Minty went on her way with the guilty consciousness that the silence that gives consent had been hers. She was going to the Hebron Savings Bank to deposit the club's money! She felt an impulse to turn her horse's head, to go clattering back in her gaudy, rickety old wagon, at which people turned to look, and to cry out to Roberta Wing that she was not going to deposit the club's money — that she had lost it! Then she could feel once more like Minty Round, who, although born and bred in the Corners, had always been truthful and honest.

But her spirit quailed; it had meant so much to her to belong to that club! To proclaim that she had lost its money and disgraced it would be to lose all the chance there was for her. And there was the hope that the druggist might be induced to help about the medicine; might even be willing to advance money for a share in it. She had a paper on which a great many miners had signed their names in testimony of its efficacy.

So she drove on, saying to herself that she was no longer the old Minty Round, and never could be again, but that she was still a girl who had a fighting chance.



"Didn't she look very queer?" said Polly Rawson, who had joined Roberta just as she accosted Minty riding by on the old wagon. "She was so white that her freckles looked as large as the spots on a tiger lily."

"I suppose she is scared at the idea of going to the bank—a Corners girl!" said Roberta. "I think it's a disgrace to the club for her to go in that way. I don't know what my cousin will think; she looks as if she had strayed out of a circus procession."

"Or the Fourth of July Antiques and Horribles," lightly laughed Polly Rawson, whose cousin was not in the bank, and who was therefore not weighed down by the disgrace. But Roberta did not laugh; she was thinking how much more appropriate it would have been—especially in view of her family connection with the bank—to have elected her treasurer of the Foreside Club.

The druggist read Minty's formula easily enough; and then he looked, with a half-wondering, half-pitying smile, at Minty's eager, anxious face.

"It's an old domestic prescription, a very good thing of its kind, but I don't think you could get it patented, and it wouldn't pay if you could; the market is flooded with just such things. It might pay you to put up some of it,—in the proper season,—and sell it with your herbs and essences," he added, seeing in Minty's face how heavy a blow



he had given her. He was a kindly man ; and he thought that Minty would not be likely to interfere much with his own trade.

“ I shall be wanting some sage and spearmint,” he called after her consolingly, as she went out. He had often bought herbs of her when hers were fresh from her garden, or his stock had run low unexpectedly. But Minty could not be consoled ; she only realized — as we all do — how great her hope had been when it failed her. She mounted her wagon in a kind of numb despair, oblivious even of the jeering boys who were always attracted to her equipage when she ventured into Hebron. She forced herself mechanically to the selling of her wares, and the effort helped her — as effort always does. Queerly enough, she thought, people were especially kind on this day. She did not know that the wan, pinched look of her face was enough to touch even a hard heart. Even those who, ever since the affair of the poultry seasoning, had shut the door coldly upon her, bought of her to-day, and with encouraging words, which cheered her a little. Yet when they knew ! when she was suspected of being a thief ! She could not help thinking over and over.

Even the very queer thing that happened at old Mrs. Pennypacker's could only hearten her for a little while. She had shrunk from going by there to-day, on account of the little grand-daughter who



made faces through the fence pickets, — small wounds being grievous to a sore heart; but as business led her through the river road, she would not allow herself to flinch. Old Mrs. Pennypacker looked at her, she thought, with a frown, from behind her syringa bush; but after she had passed the house she heard, above the rattle of her wagon, the shrill, piping voice of the small grandchild. Minty stopped, doubtfully, and expectant of hostilities.

“I don’t want to buy anything particular, Minty,” said old Mrs. Pennypacker kindly, from the gate. “But I thought you looked tired, and maybe you hadn’t had your dinner yet, and a piece of my strawberry shortcake might be kind of consoling. I’m a masterhand to make strawberry shortcake.”

Minty couldn’t eat the strawberry shortcake, but tears of gratitude at the kindness rose to her eyes. And then old Mrs. Pennypacker kissed and cried over her. “The minister and I were talking about you,” she said, — “the one that ate the gray goose and was terrible sick; and he said as like as not you ain’t to blame, and he wouldn’t have anything that we said hurt you for the world. I know, Minty, you do have a real hard time, and I’m just as ready to buy of you as I ever was; and I shall tell folks so.”

After that Minty did eat a little of the straw-



berry shortcake, just to please Mrs. Pennypacker. Then she and the maker of faces — who was in a state of manifest alarm lest she should be told of — kissed and made friends, and Minty drove away with her heart warmed and comforted. But — when they knew! when they knew!

A knot of girls was gathered at the corner of the Doughnut Ridge road, just above Dr. Pickering's. Dilly Pritchard called out to Minty as she was driving by. Dilly had been the best mathematician in the Foreside school before the girl from the Corners arrived; but Dilly was of a generous nature, far above the petty meanness of envy, and had always been of those club girls who tried to make Minty "one of ourselves." "Have you heard the beautiful news?" called Dilly. "Dr. Pickering will add to our forty-five dollars enough to buy the chapel bell, so we can have it in time for the 'Scutney Centennial next month. And the bell will have our name on it, with this: 'Presented by the Foreside Club and Dr. Thomas Pickering.' Isn't that something to be proud of when we're such a young club?"

"We're to vote on it formally at the meeting next Tuesday," said Polly Rawson, who prided herself upon being business-like; "and then give our money to the doctor."

"We were so sorry when Roberta Wing told us that our treasurer had gone to Hebron to put the



money in the bank," remarked Dilly. "You'll only have the trouble of taking it out again — and we sha'n't have a cent of interest!"

Minty forced a wan little smile, but she could not speak; she felt that impulse again to cry out the truth. But how could she when they were so proud and happy about the money? "Isn't it delightful?" said Dilly enthusiastically.

"Delightful!" repeated poor Minty huskily, as she drove away. As she drove down the hill by Dr. Pickering's, she espied Tom sitting upon a terrace, just above the willow hedge, making calculations with paper and pencil, his forehead drawn into the queer V-shaped furrows that made him look like a little old man.

Minty reined in her old horse suddenly, yielding to an impulse born of righteous indignation and despair. She would accuse Tom; appeal to him to restore the money! She could not bear to be called a thief, — for her father's sake she must not bear it. "Tom!" she called; but before he could answer, Luella's light dress appeared between the shifting green of the willow foliage.

"Have you heard of the new way to invest our money, Minty?" called Luella. "I think it will be very nice, don't you?"

There was always a little air of calm dignity about Luella which was quite different from the effervescence of the other girls; but her face was



radiant. The Foreside Club had been Luella's idea from the beginning, and she was very proud of it.

"Bells! it's all very well for girls to spend their money for bells," growled Tom, without raising his eyes from his figures; "but when you know what an awful thing the want of money is — what things a fellow has to do for it sometimes!" He raised his eyes to Minty's face suddenly, as if compelled by her steadfast gaze. She felt as if the angry accusation in her eyes must annihilate him; but he did not seem to be aware of it: Tom was near-sighted. He really needed glasses.

There was a little tremor in his voice when he spoke again, the only sign that Minty could discover that he was not as unconscious as he seemed of the feeling which she must have for him.

"Did you come along the river road? Did you see anything of my bees at old Mrs. Penny-packer's?" was what he said. "You needn't say they look just like any other bees, because they don't — they're handsomer. She was glad enough to get them, I can tell you."

"Did you put the money into the bank, Minty?" asked Luella, pausing in the act of fastening a heavily laden blackberry vine against the wall.

But Minty had started up her horse; and Luella thought the clatter of the wagon had drowned her voice, for Minty made no reply.



## CHAPTER X.

## EMMELINE JEWKES'S QUEST.

WHEN the chapel bell — the old cracked bell — began to ring out its summons to the Friday evening prayer-meeting, Delilah was to be seen setting forth leisurely from the top of the hill, in her second-best black silk — fifteen years old — and her last summer's bonnet; her Sunday radiance of apparel was never dimmed by having appeared on any other day.

Emmeline Jewkes had felt sure that she would go; and yet she drew a long breath of relief that was more than physical, as she emerged from a cramped hiding-place in the willow hedge. She knew that Delilah was not in the habit of missing the Friday evening prayer-meeting; but she said to herself that something was likely enough to happen to hinder her, just because it mattered so much to her to get her out of the way.

For Emmeline was in feverish haste to discover old Dr. Pickering's prescription, and make a cough remedy that should raise her at once from poverty. Moreover, she said to herself that if she



didn't want anything she should be determined to get into that attic just to spite that toploftical old maid that thought she could keep her out.

Elias, the hired man, was also absent, as Emmeline knew. Elias was not much of a churchgoer; but he solaced his mind by sitting in the store, where were to be heard such faint echoes of the great world as made their way to 'Scutney, and an exchange of political opinions curiously apt to be hot and strong where the world wags slowly. But Emmeline Jewkes's heart sank as she drew near Dr. Pickering's house; for Sikesy Brown, the "chore-boy," was sitting, with the air of a sentinel, on a high stool in the back porch. In fact, Sikesy was a sentinel; and Delilah had posted him upon the stool because when unemployed, a condition which Delilah graphically described as being short of mischief, it was Sikesy's infirmity to fall asleep. The stool's legs were long and Sikesy's were short, and the stool had no rounds to afford a support; moreover, the stool's seat was slippery, and when drowsiness overtook him, Sikesy was forced to wriggle and squirm to preserve his equilibrium. He was approaching the wriggling stage, and was only resisting it by the recollection that Tom's bicycle was just inside the woodshed door.

"I can take care of things just as well riding up and down between here and the Doughnut Ridge road as I can going to sleep and tumbling



off this stool," reflected Sikesy, who had a logical mind and a not over-sensitive conscience.

It was just as Sikesy's logical mind overcame his scruples that Emmeline caught sight of him; and she watched with elation while the doughty sentinel slipped from his stool, ran to the woodshed, and emerged from it speedily with a bicycle, upon which he as speedily disappeared up the road.

Now was her time. Emmeline trembled in all her gaunt frame when she tried the outer door of the woodshed and found it fastened. The only thing to do was to go through the kitchen, and be prepared with excuses if she should meet any one.

She made her way softly, softly, and no one heard her. She went up the rude and creaking stairs that led to the woodshed chamber. She thought she was probably invading the hired man's quarters, and feared to be confronted by Elias; but she found herself safely in the long corridor that led to the main body of the house. She was unfamiliar with the house; and the long summer twilight was beginning to wane, and she had to grope her way. She had a candle and matches in her pocket, — the Corners mind was not supposed to naturally prepare for emergencies, but Emmeline was a woman with a purpose, — but she dared not light them while she was in danger of encountering any one. She decided that behind a door at



one side of the corridor there must be stairs ; she had taken a careful survey of the house from the outside, and come to the conclusion that in about that place she should find the attic stairs. She tried the door — and it was locked !

“ Luck and folks and the Lord’s providence are always against me ! ” said Emmeline Jewkes bitterly. Stairs creaked behind the door ; there was a sound of hurrying feet upon them.

“ Tom ! Tom ! ” softly called a voice, — a voice that thrilled Emmeline’s heart. “ Is it you, Delilah ? ” The boyish voice was eager, but with a shade of doubt and anxiety. Emmeline Jewkes leaned against the door, and wiped a cold perspiration from her forehead.

“ Unlock the door, quick ! ” she whispered huskily. The key turned, and there was a rushing of feet up the stairs. As she opened the door she caught a glimpse of a white-gowned figure already at the top of the stairs. She remembered to lock the door behind her before she hurried, breathless and trembling, up the stairs. A muffled voice, with a boyish chuckle, came from a dim corner of the great crowded place in which she found herself.

“ I was in my nightgown, so I ran. Your cold makes your voice sound so queer that I was almost afraid, Delilah. And you said when you brought me the strawberries and cream that you shouldn’t be up again to-night.”



Emmeline knocked over the screen, — Tom's improvised clotheshorse screen, — and got upon her gaunt knees beside the low bed, and hugged her boy to her heart.

"What do they mean by locking you up here away from your mother, and me starting up in the dead of the night thinking maybe you were sick or suffering. I'll show 'em there's a law in the land to protect even folks from the Corners!"

The boy drew himself out of her arms and sat upright. He patted her grizzled head tenderly in a grave, unboyish way.

"I guess you wouldn't think there was much the matter with them if you knew!" he said; and a sob tore its way from his throat in spite of an evident struggle for manly self-restraint.

"Archie, you never stole that horse; 'twas Tom Pickering, wa'n't it? There ain't stealing in the blood, I know!" Emmeline's voice was agonized in its entreaty.

"We neither of us stole it, Tom nor I," answered the boy quickly. "I — I took it that day the great show was down at Mill Creek. The news had just come that the wild horses had got loose in the streets, and I wanted to see them. Just as I was longing to get there, and knew I couldn't, I happened to see Monty Griggs's horse tied to a fence; he could go like chain lightning, Monty Griggs's Captain could! I untied him, and



jumped onto his back. I didn't think at all. Delilah says what a fellow 'll do when he can't stop to think all depends upon what a fellow is, and I suppose that's so; you know — I had taken folks's horses before. But that time I got paid up. I've been through — lots." He held his hand up to the light that still came in at the open window, — a square, sturdy, roughened boy hand, but with the pathetic, almost transparent look that some hands acquire in illness. His mother pressed it between her two palms, and stroked it tenderly.

"I know it was all Tom Pickering's fault, somehow," she said with dogged resentment.

"Tom's fault! his fault!" cried the boy, with a shrill quiver in his voice. "Why, if it hadn't been for Tom I should be in jail, or maybe — dead! You see, there was a great crowd in the Mill Creek streets that day; they couldn't do anything with those horses. Two of them dashed right into a crowd, and in the stampede Captain got frightened — any horse would, you know; I couldn't hold him. I hadn't any saddle or bridle. He dashed down the steep embankment by the railroad track into that field where the old brickyard was. He didn't throw me; I clung to his mane. When he stumbled he caught his leg in an old railroad tie, I think, and fell. I was on top of him; if he had fallen on me I should have been killed."



"There's no thanks to Tom Pickering for that!" said Emmeline in a gratified tone.

"But the horse was awfully hurt. I thought his leg was broken. I was scared; I knew he was worth a lot of money. I ran away; 'twas mean, but I did. Tom says 'twas mean.'

"Tom! Great business Tom Pickering has to say anything is mean!" burst out Emmeline; but she stopped short, and colored a little under Archie's wondering eyes.

"I ran away with the show. I was wandering 'round, not knowing what to do; and I happened to give them a little help about the horses, and when I asked one of the men for a job he gave it to me. I wrote a note to Tom before I went, and sent it by Teddy Norcross. I couldn't bear to think of Captain lying there suffering. I thought his leg was broken, and I supposed he would have to be killed. I knew Tom would see to it, because he likes animals just as I do. Tom got the Mill Creek vet, Dr. Phlister, and had the horse carried to that old barn on his father's farm down on the river road. Captain's leg wasn't broken, it was badly hurt; and Tom has hired Dr. Phlister to attend him all this time. It must have taken a lot of money. I'm going to pay that to Tom some day — soon."

In the dim twilight Emmeline saw with a strange pang how the boy's face glowed.



“And what’s he done for me!” the sob threatened to come again, but Archie repressed it manfully. “I — I came back from the show,” he resumed steadily. “When a fellow runs away with a show he — well, he gets enough of it pretty quick! I made up my mind that being in jail was better than that. But Tom didn’t let me get into jail. At first I stayed down in the old barn, and he brought me my food; but I had got all run down with hard work and cold in the show, and I was threatened with a fever. Then Tom got me up here. Nobody knows it — nobody but Delilah; he had to tell her because I was so sick. She took care of me just as if she was — you! nights and all; and when I thought I couldn’t eat at all, she made me such nice things that I couldn’t help eating; and put ice on my head, and sang, and told me stories; and — and once, when she thought I was asleep, she kissed me — just as if she really liked me! If you feel as if you ought to be in jail, and would be if you got caught, and don’t dare to go even to your own mother for fear of bringing trouble on her — why, to think that anybody really likes you — it helps you a lot! And when I came here to sell perch, she was always cross, and said she didn’t like to trade with folks from the Corners.”

“What’s going to be done about the horse?” asked Emmeline shortly and gruffly.



“ Oh, that’s the best of all ! Captain is about well, and he’s going to be carried to Monty Griggs’s Monday. Tom thinks it will be all right ; Dr. Phlister thinks so too. The horse is in splendid condition, and Dr. Pickering has been good to Monty Griggs about a mortgage. Dr. Pickering doesn’t know yet, but Tom says he will speak to Monty Griggs for me if — if I’m sure never to be wild again. And, mother, Dr. Phlister liked me, too, when I was in the barn, and he used to come there ; and he said he would give me a place in his stables, and teach me to be a vet ! ”

It was evident that to Archie’s mind there could be no greater happiness, no higher calling, than this.

“ You could live at home with me, too, couldn’t you ? ” said his mother ; and for the first time her hard face softened and grew joyful.

“ Yes ; and Tom and I shall always be friends — he says so. And I’m going to pay him some of the money just as soon as I can. I know he has had a hard time about it ; he has been worried and queer sometimes. It was a good deal for a boy, you know, to keep the horse and all ; and he couldn’t tell his father — he’s strict about some things — until the horse was well. There was a time when we were afraid he wouldn’t get well, and the doctor would have made us tell Monty Griggs ; so you see we had to keep dark. Now it



will be all over Monday, if we can make it right with Monty Griggs ; he will believe Tom and his father when he wouldn't believe me."

"Of course Corners folks can't get anybody to believe them !" said Emmeline bitterly.

"It isn't just being Corners folks. When you've seen life, as I have, you find out that there's a kind that get believed and a kind that don't !"

One could scarcely have smiled, the boy's wan face was so solemn. It is evident that, for those who can learn, there is wisdom to be acquired even in travelling with shows.

"Then if it comes right I can come home Monday night. Delilah says I'll be well enough. I'm glad home isn't the Corners ; but I guess a fellow could begin over again even there—Tom says so."

"Tom !" echoed Emmeline, with sharp contempt. "It's always Tom !" she said under her breath. She started away hastily, but turned with a sudden impulse, and hugged the boy, and drew the bed-clothes up over his pathetically misshapen shoulders.

"A fellow can make something of himself if he has got crooked shoulders — Tom says so !" he said triumphantly. He had been morbidly sensitive about his deformity ; his mother thought it had made him reckless ; he had never spoken of it to her before.



"I ain't anywhere ; it'll always be Tom !" she said to herself as she went down the stairs. She went out boldly, not caring who saw her. What right had they to hide her boy away from her ?

In her excitement she quite forgot the errand that brought her there. In fact, it was not until the next morning that it was recalled to her mind. She went down to see Minty Round. She was possessed by a feverish restlessness ; she was nursing her resentment, and she wished (half unconsciously) to discover whether Minty Round knew about her boy's return, while they had kept her, his mother, in the dark, as if she were not to be trusted.

Tom would be likely to confide in his sister. She had heard people say how much that Pickering boy and girl thought of each other ; and Luella was making a great deal of Minty Round, and might have told her.

Teddy Norcross had brought Minty a letter just as she was starting on her route, and Minty was standing still in the garden path to read it. "Good news," Emmeline thought ; but the glow on Minty's face might have been only the effect of the sunlight, for when she put on her hat, which had fallen at her feet, and spoke to Emmeline, her face looked suddenly pinched and gray.

"Foreside don't appear to agree with you as well as the Corners did," said Emmeline suddenly.



"I'm kind of — tired," said Minty, clasping her little bony freckled hands tightly around her old green, deeply fringed parasol. She always carried that parasol, although it was a little inconvenient in driving, because it imparted an air of gentility to her equipage. "But something good has happened," she added hastily, looking up with a sudden fear in her eyes. She was always afraid of betraying Tom to Emmeline; she had felt instinctively, even before Emmeline had told her of her suspicions concerning the horse in Dr. Pickering's old barn, that Emmeline would not be sorry to know that Tom had taken the money.

"It's a beautiful thing that's happened," said Minty. "I showed the formula that father thought so much of to the Hebron apothecary, and he didn't seem to think it was worth anything; but now, after thinking it over, he offers to help me make it, to go shares for my customers, and perhaps to put it on the market. He thinks it is almost exactly like the cough medicine that old Dr. Pickering made; but no one can know whether it is or not, for the old doctor burned the formula before he died, and had all the labels on the bottles destroyed. He was afraid it would be patented, and he didn't approve of patent medicines."

Emmeline leaned upon the gate-post, and drew her faded cotton shawl wearily across her forehead.



"I'm always fussing and conniving; I guess straightforwardness is best. But it wa'n't for nothing that I climbed those attic stairs!" she muttered.

Minty looked at her worn and anxious face. It looked to her in the morning light more worn and anxious than she had ever seen it; and for a moment she forgot her own trials and difficulties — trouble makes hearts tender, unless they are very hard.

"If — if I can do it, you can help me, Emmeline; it will be work for both of us — they'll see what Corners folks can do!" But it was only a wan little smile that lighted Minty's face.

"You're real good, Minty Round." Emmeline spoke with feeling; she stammered and turned her face away. "After that lobelia and all! 'Twas me — but I never meant to do it. I just hid up a little mite of lobelia. I was afraid I couldn't get any when I wanted to — to make some cough medicine; and I meant to pay you just as soon as it came time to gather it — and somehow I mixed it up with the sage and summer savory."

Minty told her that it had not mattered much; people were beginning to buy her goods again she said, and spoke of old Mrs. Pennypacker and the strawberry shortcake, and the kindness of others.

"Things do turn out kind of well, if you give them time, don't they?" said Emmeline Jewkes;



and after this curt recognition of providence, she suddenly burst into tears, and poured out the story of her son's return. She told only the bare details. Archie had borrowed Monty Griggs's horse to go to the show, — poor lamb! any boy might have done it, — and he had lamed it. Tom Pickering had helped him to care for and cure it. It was no more than any boy would do for another, was it? especially when they had been in mischief together, as she had no doubt Tom Pickering and Archie had. That crinkly old maid had helped to take care of Archie when he was sick; she had her good streaks, like most folks.

“It — it seems good of Tom; like what I used to think he was,” murmured Minty doubtfully. “That's why — it must have cost a good deal for the horse-doctor and all!”

“Dr. Pickering's son ought to have money enough,” said Emmeline, watching her keenly.

“He has only a small allowance, the same as Luella; and their father is strict about it.”

“Well, he got it; that's all I know,” said Emmeline. “He'll get along all right, Dr. Pickering's son!” She turned away abruptly. “You think too much of those folks, Minty Round! I expect nothing but what you'd ruin yourself and your father for 'em any time!” Her face flamed as she looked back at Minty. “As for me, I'm going to look out for my own!”



To look out for one's own ! That did seem one's first duty. Should she ruin herself and her father when the choice came next Tuesday ? Minty's brain throbbed with thinking as she mounted her wagon and unfurled the green parasol.



## CHAPTER XI.

## MINTY ROUND'S LOYALTY.

LUELLA ran out to the road to speak to Minty Tuesday morning, when the latter was setting out upon her daily rounds.

Minty's problem was still unsolved, although she had racked her brains incessantly. She had tried a new way of relief, too, — one that they recommended at the chapel (Minty had never been to church until she came to the Foreside ; folks at the Corners didn't go), — although it didn't seem to her probable that the great unseen God was taking any notice of her small affairs. She had a vague feeling that he must share the general 'Scutney opinion that folks at the Corners were not worth considering. She shrank from Luella, but on this morning Luella was too happy to observe it. Her cheeks had an unwonted pink flush ; and her eyes shone, though it was through such a mist that they seemed likely at any time to overflow.

It was the joy of Archie Jewkes's safe return to his mother, and of Tom's goodness in the matter



— especially of Tom's goodness — that made her radiant. She poured the whole story out to Minty with an abandon which was something very rare in Luella Pickering.

"You don't know, Minty, how anxious I've been about Tom; you can't know, because you're not a boy's sister. And sometimes I have been afraid, Minty," Luella came close to the wagon and spoke slowly, "because there have been things that I didn't understand. Boys are different from girls; and Tom had to be mysterious about this business, hadn't he, poor fellow? O Minty, you don't know what it is to me to find that he is so kind-hearted and self-sacrificing! Delilah helped, too — but that was just like her, dear, cross, soft-hearted old Delilah!"

There were tears in Minty's eyes now; and Luella, taking them for tears of pure sympathy, was moved to further confidences.

"You see, Minty, it is this way about Tom. Just before mother died — I was only five, but I remember better than Tom — I heard her say to some one, in her weak, slow voice, 'She's a responsible little soul; she will look after the boy;' and she put her hand under my chin to raise my head so she could look into my eyes, and said solemnly, 'You will, won't you, Luella?' Mother had a brother who was very wild and reckless; that was why she was so anxious about Tom. I



think perhaps she wouldn't have said that if they had known then that I wasn't strong. It has worn on me when he would go with the boys at the Corners who were so reckless. Isn't it delightful that Archie Jewkes wasn't so bad as people thought, after all? Do you know, Minty, I think Tom has always had a good influence over him!"

Minty nodded a faint assent; she knew how blinded Luella was about Tom.

"I know you are glad for me, Minty," Luella went on, a little wistfully; for although there were still traces of tears about her eyes, Minty's face was dull and unresponsive; "but you see you can't quite understand what it is to have a brother — when there is no mother, and one has such a care over him too! I am stronger than I was, — father says so; but I think to have anything happen to Tom, or to know that he had done anything really bad, would kill me!"

All through the day's business, while she rehearsed the price of extract of lemon and warranted the purity of her vanilla, and assured people of the freshness of her chamomile and catnip, those words of Luella's sounded over and over again in Minty's ears; the whole universe seemed to be filled with the dreadful fact that it would kill Luella to know that Tom had done anything really bad. And that afternoon, at four o'clock,



she must go to the meeting of the Foreside Club and tell her, before them all, that Tom was a thief!—or else that she had lost the money, and let them all believe, as they would,—perhaps even Luella would,—that she was pretending to have lost it because she had spent it or wished to keep it! She would do that if it were not for her father's sake. Had she any right to bring disgrace upon him for the sake of sparing Luella?

Now she almost wished that she had told of the loss at once; could she not have told Luella privately—have let the truth come upon her gently? And yet it was the club's money; all the girls must have known. When she turned her horse's head towards home Minty was still struggling with bewildering, torturing doubts.

“O Luella!” it was Viola Hitchings, breathless with haste and excitement, whom Luella greeted at the door, before three o'clock that Tuesday afternoon—before three, and the club meeting was not until four. Viola had outrun Roberta Wing, who was just as eager, but weighted by a more solid corporeal substance.

“O Luella! what do you think? that girl hasn't put the money in the bank at all!” Viola's light blue eyes were actually dilated under the tow-colored bangs that were so long as to suggest a Skye terrier, or the man who jumped into the bramble-bush.



"My cousin says so!" panted Roberta Wing at the foot of the steps.

"Perhaps Minty hasn't had time; it's all the better if she didn't put it in," said Luella stoutly, after the one moment in which she had started and changed color.

"But she said she had! The morning after we voted to have it put in, Polly Rawson and I met her, and she told us that was what she was going to Hebron for!"

Roberta did not intend to bear false witness. Exact statement seems to be beyond the capacity of many people intellectually as well as morally. If Minty hadn't said just that — why, what she had said amounted (to Roberta's mind and recollection) to the same thing.

"And when we saw her coming home, — some of us club girls, up there by the Doughnut Ridge corner, — and told her of the new plan, she said she had put the money in the bank!" pursued Roberta, her tone becoming more positive as she regained her breath.

"Or at least she didn't say she hadn't, which would have been natural," said Viola Hitchings, more conscientiously, — or was it because she was touched by the painful doubt, — the painful certainty in Luella's face?

"Yes, that would have been natural," said Luella slowly. "I wish we needn't feel quite sure



that there is anything wrong about it just yet. I have always been sure that Minty was honest."

Yet in her heart Luella knew that she had believed there was something wrong as soon as she heard the story. The old suspicion of the Corners people was always ready to spring up, and Minty had been mysterious and strangely reticent of late; her moods had puzzled Luella. She felt already overwhelmed by the disgrace and disappointment that she had been the means of bringing upon the club by her ill-judged championship of this Corners girl. Yet her sense of justice, and the affection for Minty that she could not quite rid herself of, would not let her be condemned unheard.

"She's going to get up a new medicine! This very day she told Jimmy Burden so, and that she hoped to bring him some to cure his cough. It takes money to get up a medicine!"

Roberta Wing, alas! could not mourn the downfall of the treasurer of the Foreside Club, who, she felt, had usurped a place which rightfully belonged to a girl who had a cousin in the bank.

"I don't think she would steal the money," said Viola Hitchings, coming to Minty's rescue, as she caught a glimpse of Luella's whitening cheeks as the latter hastily turned away her head. "I must say I think it's a mistake socially to make too much of a girl from the Corners; but I don't think



we ought to say dreadful things of her without more reason for it. I only thought that she didn't know enough to put the money in the bank; Corners people's banks — if they have any — are old stockings."

The girls came dropping in early by ones and twos and threes. Almost all had heard that their treasurer had failed to follow instructions, and deposit the club's money in the bank. Selina Craigie, whose impulsive temperament had been one of the prime factors in Minty's election, was evidently somewhat dismayed, but expressed great indignation that any girl should hint that there could be anything worse than a misunderstanding in the matter; she even went so far as to confide to Polly Rawson that she wished she might never hear anything more about Roberta Wing's cousin in the bank. Polly had faith in Minty on intellectual rather than moral grounds; she didn't believe that a girl who could do things in her head like a lightning calculator could be so stupid as to misappropriate the club's funds.

Dilly Pritchard was inclined to be Minty's friend, as always; but she admitted that she had thought that Minty behaved a little oddly that day at the Doughnut Ridge corner. The queer old clock in the corner pointed to four; and the rope-skipping girl, whose machinery was a little rusty, took four jerking skips.



"She won't come!" said Roberta Wing.

A tennis racket was swung across the window outside, and Tom's white-capped head appeared above it. "Who won't come?" he asked in affected surprise. "Did any one ever stay away who was permitted to come to these feasts of reason and flows of soul?"

"Tom!" Luella stepped hastily to the window, and held down the wire screen which he had been about to raise. Tom, as has been said, had been a privileged visitor, — on the window-seat, — notwithstanding the club's professed exclusion of "gentlemen." He infused a liveliness into the somewhat dull proceedings; moreover, he was captain of the boat-club just now, and the projector of delightful water picnics. The Foreside Club felt that it was policy to be polite to him. "Tom, this really is a private meeting," said Luella firmly. "There is business of — importance to come before it."

"If that's the case, I should think you would want the help of good, cool, clear masculine brains like mine," said Tom; but his tone changed suddenly as he looked at Luella's face. "Luella never looks like that for nothing," he said to himself, and was turning away in silence when Dilly Pritchard called out impetuously, —

"Oh, do let him stay! We're all wrought up about it; and he will have a cooler head because he hasn't been thinking and talking about it!"



In truth, Dilly knew that Tom was good-natured, and she thought he would be friendly to Minty. Whatever Minty had done, Dilly didn't want the girls to be too hard on her; she was tender-hearted, and didn't believe in being too hard on people.

As a door in the back part of the house was opened, Emmeline Jewkes's high-keyed voice reached the dining-room. "She's so happy she can't keep quiet," said Tom, a pleased, self-conscious flush upon his face. "Before she came in I saw her walking up and down the road in front of the house, talking to herself."

The girls had almost all heard of Tom's kindness to the boy from the Corners; those who had not now listened to it with flattering interest and praises. Luella's sisterly heart thrilled; whatever Minty Round had done, she could feel a joyful pride in Tom.

"My father didn't think I was so very good," said Tom with a slow wag of his head. "He gave me a good going over for not going straight to Monty Griggs with the horse; but a fellow feels sneaking to turn informer, and it did seem a pretty bad business when we thought the horse would have to be killed. There comes Minty Round," — Tom's tone changed suddenly as he looked down the road, — "and — good gracious! isn't Minty perfectly stunning to-day?"

Minty wore a bright purple poplin dress. Mrs.



Wicks of Doughnut Ridge had given it to her to make a bedquilt; but Minty had kept it for its beautiful color, although it was faded in streaks. She had never worn it before: she had been keeping it for a great occasion, and now one had come; for Minty had resolved that if she could not bring herself to betray Tom, she would yet, for her father's sake, hold up her head. She wore a frayed black silk shawl that had been her mother's, and again the large white silk gloves — her father's wedding gloves. She walked with dignity, and carried over her shoulder her deeply fringed green parasol.

Minty herself cared little for dress, otherwise she might have had a better eye for effect; but her quick perceptions — or her mathematical bump — enabled her to discern its influence upon others. This toilet was intended to assert her dignity, and impress the club girls. As she walked into the club-room no one would have suspected that the streaked poplin covered a faint heart.

“Isn't she brazen?” murmured Roberta Wing.

The business of the meeting was begun in an embarrassed way. The president made some business remarks in a desultory manner to “Miss Chairman,” Polly Rawson; and the chairman made some unimportant reports, interspersed by facetious comments by Tom, whose gaze Minty tried in vain to draw.



Then the president, in a voice that shook slightly, proposed that they should vote upon the question of donating the club's assets towards the purchase of the chapel bell; and the "ayes" had it unanimously. Tom declared that it was especially appropriate that a girls' club should spend its first earnings for sounding brass; but Tom's levity was less marked than usual: he was growing restless and embarrassed under Minty Round's gaze.

"Then there is nothing more to do," began the president; and she smiled towards Minty hopefully, though her lips were blue, "except to ask our treasurer to give our money, forty-five dollars and sixty-six cents, into the hands of the bell committee to-morrow morning."

Dead silence for a moment; then Roberta Wing stirred in her chair, and flounced her skirts a little; two or three of the girls exchanged glances.

Minty arose from her chair, and her green parasol fell to the floor; in her clinched, nervous hands the great white gloves were pulled and torn recklessly. "I can't give 'em the money because I hain't got it — nary cent of it!" She held back a great sob, but the vernacular of the Corners would have its way. "I told you I would take care of it, anyhow, and so I meant to; but 'twas hid under father's pillow, and — and somehow it got lost! I'm a-goin' to pay it back," — Minty's tone was fierce now, — "don't you darst to believe



I won't pay it back! I ain't a thief! I've got a new chance, and the Hebron apothecary is a-goin' to help me! Don't you, don't you hender that, tellin' that I'm a thief, will you? Because then I can't pay it back, and I don't know what would become of father." The piteous voice ceased suddenly; it was because of the sob, but the sob did not have its way.

There was a murmur all over the room; many were pitiful, but the disappointment about the money was keen, and there was a mystery here that seemed like guilt.

"If it was stolen, why don't you try to find the thief?" Selina Craigie asked impetuously.

"I never said 'twas stolen!" Minty had seen Luella's hand creep around to her side,—her left side,—the little gesture that always frightened her. "It — was gone, and that's all!"

"I move that Minty Round be expelled from this club!" said Roberta Wing firmly.

There was a confusion of voices, some seconding the motion, others dissenting.

"I — I say, girls, that's a shame!" This was from Tom, whose face, pressed against the window-screen, had flushed and paled by turns.

"Minty, can't you tell us all about it?" said Luella appealingly.

"I ain't a-goin' to," said Minty doggedly. "If — if you think what you're a mind to about



me, even if you spoil my business, I ain't a-goin' to!"

It was Luella's affectionate, appealing tone that had strengthened the half-wavering resolve.

"The idea of her thinking so much about her business! I'm afraid that shows," said Polly Rawson in an only half-suppressed whisper.

"Minty, if you won't tell us about it, I'm afraid you — you'd better resign," said Luella; but she shrank from the chorus of assent that showed how many had been restrained only by regard for her.

"I don't think her resignation is enough," said Roberta Wing severely. "I think it ought to be put on record that the Foreside Club doesn't fellowship her."

Minty arose, and turned towards the door that was nearest to her; there were blinding tears in her eyes, and she fumbled for the knob. The sense of loneliness and wrong, the loss of her great chance, overwhelmed her. And it was Luella who had turned her out! She didn't care for that other girl, with her talk of putting things on record; but it was Luella! And she would always think her a thief. She turned suddenly, with an impulse too strong for her, towards the window, as she opened the door.

"O Tom! Tom!" she cried, as she rushed out.

"La, it wa'n't him!" Emmeline Jewkes's gaunt figure thrust Minty aside. Her voice was harsh



and strident, and there were spots of brilliant color on her high cheek-bones. "Wouldn't you think she'd have known better than to think Dr. Pickering's son would steal? I just let the play go on, laughing at her in my sleeve! But then, 'twas natural enough she should, for there wa'n't anybody there but him and Teddy Norcross and me. I just stepped in a minute coming home from Hebron. There's your money, — forty-five dollars and sixty-six cents. Nobody stole it!"

Emmeline looked defiantly around the room. "I took it out from under the pillow by accident, thinking I'd just take a look at a medical prescription there was there. I sent Teddy Norcross to get me a drink, so's to get a chance to look at that prescription. And Minty's father woke up before I could put it back. When I found out she thought Tom Pickering took it, why, I just waited to see what she would do. I came here to-day thinking I wouldn't let him be called a thief that had been so good to my Archie; and when I heard her holler out — I thought you'd die, Minty Round, rather than let Luella Pickering's brother be called a thief!"

"You thought it was he—all the time, Minty — and you didn't tell!" said Luella slowly. "I never can forgive myself!"

"La, what a terrible great fuss you young folks make!" said Emmeline easily. "If I had kept



the money to start my medicine with, as I had most a mind to, why, it would only have been borrowing it. I should have paid it back."

There was no response; evidently no one cared to discuss Emmeline Jewkes's moral views.

"Well, here's your money, and now I hope you'll be done fussin'. Minty Round, you look as if you'd had a fit of sickness. Who's the one to take the money?"

"The treasurer!" cried Selina Craigie. And "The treasurer!" shouted a chorus which even included Roberta Wing — every voice, in fact, but Luella's. It must be admitted — though not lightly would I belittle the business-like character of this club — that Luella was crying.

The chairman thumped, with the great knobbed end of Minty's parasol, for order.

"I move," she said (though it was not at all in order for her to make a motion), "I move that Minty Round be formally requested to continue in her office as treasurer of this club, and to accept the club's hearty apologies for its unkind treatment of her!"

Oh, and then there was cheering! As for Tom, he had disappeared around the corner of the house.

"Girls!" he murmured contemptuously, as he went; but he drew his hand furtively across his eyes. He certainly had had another experience.



Emmeline Jewkes cast a gracious smile around the room as she went out. "I guess you've found out that folks from the Corners ain't thieves!" she said.

"O Tom! what will you ever think of me, and of the way I — I looked at you?"

Tom had gone around to the back porch, after the club meeting broke up. He had said to himself that in Delilah's domain scenes were unlikely; but Minty Round had found him.

"It isn't every girl who would keep it to herself; I knew you saw Archie Jewkes that day. I thought that was why you looked daggers at me. I'll tell you what I think of you, Minty Round," Tom turned away, and spoke gruffly; "I think you're a good deal of a girl!"

Minty turned a radiant face towards Delilah, who appeared in the porch. "People are so good to me! the girls and everybody," she said. "And now I've got such a chance!"

Delilah carried the end of her gingham apron towards her eyes, then tossed it back hastily. "I ain't one of the sloppin' over kind," she said; "but there are some folks from the Corners that suit me pretty well."





MINTY TURNED A RADIANT FACE TOWARD DELILAH.







## CHAPTER XII.

## THE JECKS FAMILY.

TOM'S eyes troubled him ; Luella "seemed sort o' peaked," so Delilah declared ; Dr. Pickering felt that a change would be good for them all. So did Tom and Luella ; and that is the reason why, the summer following the one that witnessed the vindication of the treasurer of the Foreside Club, the Pickerings went down from 'Scutney to Sandy Beach.

They had been there several weeks before Luella Pickering could really make up her mind as to the Jeckses. But when Luella did make up her mind she was "apt to be sot," as Delilah put it.

And now, it must be said, Luella had reached a decision, and had her own opinion of the Jecks family. She always took pains to say that she knew nothing against Tryphena Jecks ; she might be a good enough little thing, but she really ought to have brought up the boys better. Luella, as we know, had had experience with Tom ; and she had a theory that sisters were responsible for their brothers' behavior, especially when there was no



mother, as was the case in both the Jecks family and her own. See how she had brought up Tom, Luella said. And he was fully a head taller than she, even if they were twins.

Luella didn't really know much about the Jecks boys ; but she had heard that they were rough, and talked slang, and didn't always take off their hats to a girl. Some people made excuses for them on the ground that they had no mother ; and as for their father — well, he had been convicted of forgery. He had served a term in prison, and since then he had never been able to "hold up his head." He shut himself up, and scarcely spoke to any one. They had one servant, but they seemed to have no relatives or friends. "How should the boys have any bringing up?" some people said.

When Dr. Pickering took a cottage at Sandy Beach for the summer, Luella discovered that their nearest neighbors were the Jeckses, who had retired to a dilapidated old farmhouse a little way back from the beach. Luella, who had once been at school with Pheny, confided to her most intimate friend, Polly Rawson, who was to spend the summer vacation with her, that she "didn't know what they should do about that girl."

Luella's Aunt Esther, who had come to spend the summer with the Pickerings, was an invalid ; so Luella was virtually the head of the household, with Delilah as a vigorous assistant. Dr. Pickering



was at 'Scutney even more than at Sandy Beach, and he never interfered with her. Luella liked this state of affairs, and felt herself mistress of the situation; but she was a little embarrassed about the Jecks family.

"What do you think Aunt Esther said when I told her those people were here?" she asked Polly Rawson. "She said, 'How fortunate! You may be able to be a great help to them.' Aunt Esther has such queer ideas! I don't think it would be right to expose Tom to the influence of those boys."

"Oh, there's no fear of him! Now, it seems to me, Tom's lost his spirits since his eyes hurt him. He only wants to draw; and how is a boy with weak eyes going to draw?" replied Polly with a touch of scorn. Polly did like a boy who would sometimes take one out rowing, or carry one's basket at a picnic. Tom used to be that way. She sometimes thought Luella was too complacent about Tom's "bringing up."

"I hope he has different tastes from those Jecks boys," said Luella severely; "but of course it would be safer not to bring him into contact with them." And after applying this salve to her conscience she went on quite briskly, "I really think it would be better for us—well, not to hurt her feelings, but to sort of turn our backs if we meet Pheny Jecks."



That certainly had not been Luella's way with Minty Round; but it was different somehow about Pheny Jecks, so her plan was carried out the very next morning when they went rowing. Pheny was standing quite near the slip, with a fish-net in her hand, a very queer figure, in an old pea-jacket that must have belonged to one of the boys, with her long black hair blowing out from under her red cap, and her face tanned like a gypsy's.

"She's quite impossible, isn't she?" said Luella, when they had pushed off out of hearing.

"She has changed dreadfully. She looks as if she never had any good times; and do you know, Luella, I think we hurt her feelings, for I saw her lip quiver." Polly spoke sympathetically, but Polly was light-minded; she was learning to row, too, and long before they were out of sight of the queer figure on the beach she had forgotten all about the meeting with Pheny Jecks.

It was Pheny Jecks who could not forget. Her brother Greg came along a few minutes after, and found her prone on her face in the sand, behind a great rock.

"What are you howling about?" he demanded, somewhat roughly. He was in a hurry to look after his lobster-pots, out beyond the weirs.

"It—it isn't anything," said Pheny chokingly.

"Pheny, you're not such a goose as to care about those girls? A pair of silly snobs!" said



Greg, in a tone of extreme disgust. "No fellow would think of minding such a thing!"

Greg, mending his net at a little distance, had witnessed the meeting between the new-comers and Pheny, and had strongly hoped that Pheny wouldn't care. He had been quite comfortably certain that she would be too proud to show it if she did care. It was very unusual for her to give way to her feelings like this.

"I used to go to school with them," said Pheny, bravely forcing back her tears. "It was so different then, Greg! I know it was foolish; but, all of a sudden, I couldn't help it!"

"Of course it is different; things have to be different in this world. You have to have pluck," said Greg wisely. "After all, it's harder for Milt than for any of the rest of us. Milt means to be somebody." Perhaps Greg had a shrewd idea that the way to make Pheny forget her troubles was to set her to thinking of another person's. Pheny was used to thinking of other people's troubles. She felt the responsibility of the boys, in spite of Luella Pickering's opinion. She meant to be a mother to them — even to Milt, the eldest, who was almost sixteen; and the boys, when they felt very good-natured, called her "little marmee."

"And it's the hardest of all for — for the poor old dad," continued Greg hesitatingly, and with something very like a break in his voice. "A



fellow comes to realize as he grows older how dreadful it must be to have done something that spoils everything, and can't be helped."

Pheny's tearful eyes grew clear and round with astonishment. Who would have expected Greg, who was such a harum-scarum fellow, to have such thoughts in his head?

"When there are such tremendous things in the world, the little things ought to look awfully small," said Greg, running away, with the sense of having administered a proper tonic.

But Duff Jecks, who was following in Greg's wake, as he generally did, and had seen and heard everything, was of the opinion that Pheny had received but cold comfort. "You just leave those girls to me! I'll take the wind out of their sails!" he stopped to say, with emphatic nods, before he followed Greg to the shore. Duff was a long-legged boy, taller than Greg, although he was only twelve, and Greg was fourteen. His arms and legs would grow out of his jackets and trousers, even faster than his elbows and knees went through them; and he had a great crop of red hair, which, in defiance of brush and comb, stood upright above his freckled face. Perhaps it was true, as Pheny sometimes dejectedly thought, that Duff would never look, under any circumstances, as if he were well brought up. His combative tendencies had gained him the nickname of Mac-



duff before he was seven, and now it was almost forgotten that his real name was Philip. With his brother, in some unexplained way, John Henry had become Macgregor. Pheny had tried to call them by their real names; but they persisted in thinking she was "cross" if she did so, and the effort was given up.

Pheny ran after Duff, alarmed by his threat.

"Duff, you mustn't say anything to those girls!" she cried, "nor do anything to annoy them. I will never forgive you, Duff, if you do!"

Duff ran on, pretending not to hear. His temper was not improved by the discovery that Greg and Milt had pushed off without him in the *Tramp*, their little catboat, — a patched-up and fishy craft, but a treasure. It was useless to call to them to come back; the wind was wavering, and they were in haste, and two were a crew for the *Tramp*, especially as she might get a load of lobsters. Duff, with much grumbling, baled out his leaky old rowboat, which he had bought of a fisherman for a song, and set off by himself, with only a fish-line for company.

Meanwhile, the *Tramp* was making her way, as well as a light and dallying breeze would let her, out toward the lobster-pots. Milt had fastened the sheet, which he was usually so prudent as to hold in his hand, and had drawn a book out from under the one dingy cushion that the *Tramp*



boasted. It was a finely bound book, and Greg caught sight of colored plates as Milt opened it.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"That four-eyed fellow left it," said Milt, with a nod toward the pretentious Queen Anne cottage of the Pickerings. He scowled as he said it; and the scowl gave him a curious resemblance to Duff, although his face was much stronger; a fine, keen face was Milt's, although marred by a trace of sullenness about the mouth.

"Is that what he's up to?" said Greg. "I've come across him in out-of-the-way corners, among the rocks and in the woods, with his nose buried in a book, or scratching away with a pencil for dear life. He used to think he could draw when he was in the grammar school. Then he got up a newspaper; he's always been up to something. You don't suppose he is trying for that prize?"

Milt nodded, without raising his eyes.

"It's something to try for—a three years' course at the Institute, and a year of study abroad afterward," said Greg meditatively, "if that's the sort of thing that a fellow wants. But he can have it any way; his father will send him. Why should he bother himself about the prize design?"

"It's an honor," said Milt briefly, still intent upon the book.

"That's it! he wants to be cock of the walk



every way!" said Greg. "But, Milt, you couldn't try for the prize; you're not sixteen."

"I shall be, three days before the designs are to be entered," said Milt.

"He's really thinking of it!" said Greg to himself. "I don't see how you can expect to get it when you've had no training at all," he went on aloud. Greg didn't mean to be a wet blanket; he was sympathetic, and felt Milt's troubles keenly, just as he did Pheny's, and thought it would be unendurable to have him disappointed. But Milt didn't understand, and was angry.

"I wish you would leave me in peace when you know I have only a minute or two to look at this book!" he said.

"Why don't you borrow it?" suggested Greg.

"Borrow it of him! I would have burned the boat before I would have let it to him, if we hadn't been obliged to have the money. I wouldn't touch this book if" —

"You're awfully bitter, Milt," said Greg, gazing at him reflectively.

"I suppose poverty and disgrace are apt to make people so," said Milt.

"Hark! What's that?" exclaimed Greg. "It sounded like a cry of distress. Some one's in trouble!"

Milt thrust his book under the cushion, while Greg brought the *Tramp* around, and headed her



in the direction from which the cry came. They could dimly descry a rowboat, a motionless dark speck between the dazzling sky and the shimmering sea; and it soon became evident that it was from thence that the cry for help proceeded.

"Some one has got caught on the Thumbscrew! That rock will tear a rowboat to pieces if it gets stuck in a certain place. We must hurry!" said Greg.

But the wind was in no mind for helping; they were forced to beat, and made very little progress; and they found to their consternation that, contrary to their custom, they had left the oars ashore.

"Whoever it is will be drowned before we get there!" said Greg despairingly. "But see! There's another boat! What is that fellow dawdling about like that for? Say there, hurry!" And Greg and Milt both made frantic signals to a boy in a rowboat which they now noticed for the first time, and which was much nearer the rock than they were.

"If it isn't Duff!" suddenly exclaimed Greg. "What ails the young beggar? Can't he see or hear? Duff, hurry! There's a rowboat aground on the Thumbscrew!"

"I see it. It's that girl, and she can stay aground for all me!" growled Duff, rowing leisurely away.



“Bring that boat here if you won’t go yourself! What difference does it make who it is? Don’t you know that she may be drowned?” cried Milt.

“There’s no danger. They’re girls, and so they’re hollering,” said Duff, with affected indifference. “Girls always do. I’m not going to bother myself for Pickerings. Look! There’s a boat putting out to them! It will get there a long time before I could.” There was unmistakable relief in Duff’s tone.

Greg stood up, shading his eyes with his hand, and anxiously scrutinized the boat which had put out from the shore to the relief of the shipwrecked mariners.

“It’s the old scow — and if that isn’t Pheny!” he exclaimed, after a moment. “I can see her red cap. It’s Pheny going to rescue Luella Pickering!”



## CHAPTER XIII.

## PHENY TO THE RESCUE.

GREG was right ; it was Pheny who had put off to rescue Luella Pickering from the Thumbscrew.

"That old scow is heavy," Greg went on ; "and she has no one with her but little Jason. It is plucky of her, and she'll get there too ! She's that kind. Sometimes I think that we boys don't realize how much of a girl she is, nor how much she has to put up with. She never howls, you know — or at least not often," he amended, with a vivid recollection of that morning's experience. "I wonder if she knows who it is !" he added suddenly. "Of course she'd go just the same ; but won't that girl sing small !"

Milt was struggling to propel the *Tramp* against the wind toward the disabled boat.

"It's too hard for Pheny to row that heavy scow, with only that little lubber to help her," he said.

"Jason means well, though he is fat, and sucks his thumb," said Greg charitably. "Pheny will get there ; no fear but Pheny will get there !"



The two girls in the other boat were breathlessly watching the approach of the scow. They were in some real danger; for as the tide fell the boat heeled over, and the water began to come in through its seams. Suddenly Polly Rawson cried that the girl in the scow was Pheny Jecks.

Polly herself had no anxiety except that the scow might reach them before her feet were any deeper in the water; but Luella had not got beyond the point of feeling the bitterness of being rescued by Pheny Jecks.

"I almost wish that we hadn't screamed so," she said. "The tide is going out, and this rock will be almost bare; we might have waded ashore. Anyway, some one would have been sure to come — some one who wasn't one of those Jeckses. Of course it is good of her," she added in response to Polly's shocked remonstrance. "I always said that she was a good enough little thing."

Pheny pulled bravely, although her arms ached so that it seemed as if she must give up. Little Jason, who was the nine-year-old son of the Jeckses' servant, was afflicted with a far worse infirmity than excess of adipose substance, — namely, laziness; and Pheny was driven to doubt whether he propelled the weight of his own plump person. But Jason felt himself to be a man, and said the scow was "orfle light."

Polly Rawson hailed their deliverer from afar.



"O Pheny, do hurry! I always said that you were the nicest girl at Miss Crawford's; and I am not one to forget my friends, whatever some people may do. But how we're to get into that boat I don't see!"

Pheny said nothing at all; but then she was breathless from her exertions, and anxious about the transfer of the passengers to her clumsy old scow. This was effected at length, and with the disabled rowboat in tow the scow was headed for the shore. Luella had said nothing; but when by chance her eyes met Pheny's they suddenly filled with tears. Luella took an oar, and found it some relief to her feelings to pull with might and main, while Jason found his mission in giving orders. Polly rehearsed their perils at great length, and was voluble in expressing her gratitude.

"You didn't say a word, Luella! I think it was horrid of you!" she exclaimed, as they parted from Pheny at the pier.

"I couldn't! O Polly Rawson! don't you see that I couldn't?" cried Luella, with a great lump in her throat.

"I never saw any one hold on to her pride as you do," said Polly. And Luella didn't explain, as she felt inclined to do, that her conscience was "holding on" to her. There were some things which Polly didn't seem to understand.

Duff, meanwhile, was much disturbed. He was



conscious of having acted a very unmanly part, and it was not pleasant to be scorned by Milt. He skulked about all day, out of sight of the boys. He had to go home at night to help with the "chores;" they would make a great fuss if he didn't, he said to himself. But Milt only said, with no more than his accustomed brotherly frankness, —

"You contemptible little shirk! why didn't you go and help those girls?"

Luella Pickering, too, was not a little troubled in mind. She would have to invite Pheny to her house now. She could not remain under such an obligation. Another thought, too, was leavening her pride. Luella had discovered that she had been mean and selfish. "If you really want to help her you'll find a way," Aunt Esther said; but Luella couldn't see how. It had soothed her feelings a little to present a quarter to Jason, who, being hindered by no sensitive pride, had repaired to the confectionery shanty farther down the beach, and indulged in peanuts and "jaw-breakers" to an extent unprecedented in his experience. To him the adventure had been wholly satisfactory; and he resolved, as he munched his "jaw-breakers," that to be a hero and rescue shipwrecked mariners should be his regular occupation in life.

"Those people!" Luella's father had said, with a quick frown, when Polly, at dinner, related their



morning adventure. "I should prefer you to have nothing to do with them. Jecks rigidly secludes himself, and I think he doesn't wish his children to associate with others," he added. That was a strange way to put it, thought Luella. A man like that, a forger, didn't wish his children to associate with them! "But we owe the girl thanks; some one must go over there," Dr. Pickering continued, with another frown. "Tom would better go."

Tom looked very much disinclined to be the bearer of the family thanks to Pheny Jecks. "I don't — don't know what to say to her," he said.

He went, however, without any further objections. Tom now generally did what was expected of him. Luella thought that this great virtue was due to his bringing-up.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE TREMAINE PRIZE.

THE *Tramp* had carried a load of lobsters to the canning factory; and afterward her owners had hoed corn all the long, hot day, until their muscles were sore, and Milt's heart burned hotly against his uncongenial lot. As for Greg, he had a sturdy philosophy about it: since he had to hoe corn, he meant to hoe it so that it should be of some account; and since he had to learn farming, he meant to have a great ranch of his own some day. And there were the fall days to look forward to, — long, golden days, full of sea and forest scents, and with a frosty tingle to make one's blood bound, in which one could go nutting and gunning, and take breezy sails in the *Tramp*. Greg thought it a pity that Milt couldn't make the best of things, as he did.

Milt had thrown himself on the grass, under the gnarled old butternut-tree, with Tom Pickering's book on architecture carefully wrapped in his handkerchief to keep it from the grass, when Tom came along the lane, adjusting his glasses in



the nervous way that had come to him with impaired sight. He had to wear glasses since his eyes were weak, and they were quite a cross.

"There's that four eyes again! What does *he* want?" growled Greg, who was teaching Pheny to tie a sailor's knot. "He rubs me the wrong way, and the sparks begin to fly out of Milt the moment he comes around. I suppose he wants to hire the *Tramp*, and complain again that she is fishy."

"He sha'n't have her!" cried Milt hotly, perhaps the more hotly that it was bitter to be discovered in possession of that book. He wished that he had sent it back at once, and not yielded to the temptation to keep it over night.

"I suppose you have come for your book," he said, rising and extending it toward Tom with a heavy scowl. "I — I meant to return it yesterday, but " —

"I never expected to see it again! I was going to send for another copy!" exclaimed Tom. He scowled responsively, as he took the book; it was only the result of near-sightedness, but Milt didn't know that.

"We're not thieves," said Milt resentfully.

"Oh, I — I didn't know where I left it, you know," explained Tom, looking a little alarmed at Milt's fierceness. "I didn't know that — that you cared for such things," he added. "If you care to look at it further, you are welcome to."



"Thank you, I don't," said Milt curtly; so curtly that Greg snickered involuntarily, and Tom colored.

He was turning away, when he suddenly remembered his errand. It was ridiculous to care for the rudeness of these ignorant fellows, he said to himself; and he was ashamed that it had made him forget for a moment what he had come for.

"I came over to—to express my father's thanks and my own to your sister," he said stiffly. "She was very kind and very brave to rescue my sister this morning."

Pheny displayed a blushing, radiant face from behind the lilac-bush, to whose shelter she had retreated.

"It was so nice that I got there before they were very wet!" she said delightedly, while Greg growled, "Keep still!" under his breath, and Milt's scowl became direfully black. Pheny never did have any proper pride. "I wish the scow had been nicer," continued Pheny. "And little Jason wasn't so very clean. It is very hard for Arabella to keep him so—such a fat little boy, who is up to everything."

Tom found a friendly face so agreeable among these scowling Jeckses that this apology of Pheny's didn't strike him as being "idiotic," as Milt and Greg afterward cordially agreed that it was.

"I am sure it was very kind and brave of



you," repeated Tom stammeringly. He understood even less how to get on with the girl than with these rough Jecks boys, and always gave her as wide a berth as possible. But now he had a strong impression that she was an uncommonly nice girl, and resolved to make Luella "do the square thing by her." He would have liked to give further expression to his approval of Pheny, but this was quite beyond him. He got himself away, shamefacedly, with one more little murmur of gratitude, to which Pheny dared not reply, the boys' looks were so dreadful.

He had gone but a few rods when he turned back, with a piece of paper in his hand.

"I don't know how this design came to be in the book," he said. "I didn't leave it there."

Milt stepped forward, and snatched it almost roughly from his hand. "Give it to me! It's mine," he said.

"You — you drew it?" asked Tom, in evident astonishment. "I didn't know that any one about here could draw like that."

Gratification showed in the flush which rose to Milt's forehead, although he tried very hard to conceal it.

"I have never been taught," he said, in a mollified tone. "I've picked up a few ideas here and there, that's all."

"I think you have managed to pick up some



pretty valuable ones ! ” said Tom Pickering heartily. And then an idea struck him that caused his face to darken suddenly. Was it possible that this fellow could mean to try for the great prize which old Captain Lucas Tremaine, the richest man in the town of Hebron, had offered ? It was a prize that meant not only the course of study at the Institute and the year of study abroad, but distinction, success !

Now it happened that the doctor’s son had made up his mind to win that prize himself.



## CHAPTER XV.

## MILT'S AMBITION.

TOM PICKERING had always been ambitious. From the day when he had started the '*Scutney Mail*' with Macurdy Green, he had imbibed some of Macurdy's determination. To win what others tried for and failed to get,—that was the aim which he was now keeping more and more before him. Indeed, it was this, rather than Luella's influence, which, since the escapade with Monty Griggs's horse, had kept him out of what is commonly called "mischief." His father noticed and was proud of Tom's ambition; and so was Luella, as unconscious as Tom himself of its ignoble quality.

"Of course one must have training in order to do anything that is of any consequence," he hastened to say to Milt, watching the other's expression narrowly. But it was impossible to discover in Milt's face whether he meant to try for the Tremaine prize.

"If — if I could help you," said Tom. "I've been studying it quite a while, you see."



Tom was but dimly conscious of the mixed motives which prompted this speech of his. "I should really like to help him along a little if he isn't trying for the prize — and I could find out what he was up to." This was the thought which lay in the background. Tom was kind-hearted, and liked to help people — if only they were not trying to wrest even the smallest share of his coveted glory from him.

"I don't ask any help," said Milt ungraciously. He said to himself that the easy superiority of this smooth fellow was more than he could endure.

Tom washed his hands of the Jecks family as he turned away: he even doubted whether, after all, it would be of any use for Luella to try to help that nice little girl; her brothers would always stand in her way. But that fellow could draw! The design was original, and yet on conventional lines; the style was much more suitable for a library building than the one he had begun. Why hadn't he thought of it? Probably the fellow was only trying for practice — just to see what he could do. If the committee had called for sketches in the rough, his might be among those chosen; but he would never be able to develop, to elaborate, it; that was where training came in!

"But I wish I had thought of that style," Tom said to himself. "Or, rather, had thought of com-



binning those two styles as he has done." He sat down on a rock, and drew some hasty outlines on a fly-leaf of his book. "I don't want to forget it," he said to himself. "He'll probably throw it away. Of what use could it be to an ignorant fellow like him? How stupid of me to tell him that it was good for anything! He would never have known it."

But Milt had not thrown his sketch away; he was brooding over it, with knitted brows, under the old butternut-tree. He rubbed out a line here, and added a touch there. His heart swelled suddenly with hope and pride as he rose to his feet. He saw a wide vista opening before him out of the heavy shadow of poverty and disgrace. He would take them all with him: the boys should have their chance; so should "little marmee," whose woes and deprivations made him sick and sore when no one knew that he cared; the poor old dad, as Greg called him, whom Milt, with a sturdy faith which would not give way, had never believed guilty — he should hold his head up once more honorably among men! This was Milt's ambition.

"It *is* good! He saw it! It's my opportunity! Some way I'll learn how to finish it!" said Milt, through his set teeth.

Tom arose from his bed at midnight. He had often said to Luella that "when an idea got to



running in his head he could not sleep." He went up to his studio, a little room under the roof, tore that fly-leaf out of his book, and sat down with it at his desk. "I only saw it, any way," he said to himself. "No one could say that I was taking anything that belonged to him. Very likely I should have thought of the same thing in time. Anyway, it couldn't possibly be of any use to a fellow like him, because he wouldn't know what to do with it. If I should win the prize, I'll — I'll do something for him."



## CHAPTER XVI.

## ARABELLA'S VICTORY.

A FEW days later Pheny Jecks received a dainty note from Miss Luella Pickering, inviting her to a lawn party. She was radiant with delight ; although Milt scowled at it darkly, and Greg said that he did hope they all had too much pride to be patronized by those Pickerings. Duff was her only ally, an unexpected one, for Duff had been most bitter toward the "snobbish Pickerings."

"I'll tell you what, boys, Pheny is going to have trouble enough to get the dad to let her go. We all ought to pitch in and help instead of hindering her," he said seriously. "It would be a pity if she couldn't have one good time!"

Pheny had put her head in at the kitchen window. (They were all in the garden when the note came.)

"Arabella, I know there are no more tucks to be taken out of my old spotted muslin, but *don't* you think the hem might be let down so that I could wear it to Luella Pickering's lawn party?" she said wistfully.



"Well, I should think I had my hands about full enough without fixin' folks up to go to parties!" replied Arabella tartly, scrubbing little Jason's nose the wrong way. She had little cork-screw ringlets, which danced as if they were on wires when she shook her head. One could always judge just about how cross Arabella was by the way in which her ringlets danced. "I'm all wore to skin and bone without takin' no hems out," she added.

But Pheny did not look discouraged as she turned away her head. "She will!" she whispered softly, and Duff nodded sagely in reply. It was generally admitted that, in the boys' parlance, Arabella's "bark was worse than her bite."

"Will you come with me, Duff, to the dad?" asked Pheny.

Duff shook his head, after a moment of deliberation. "He's got a lot of bean-poles laid up against me. You'll do better without me."

Pheny took her way down into the south field, where her father was hoeing corn, her heart beating quickly with hope and fear. The boys watched her wonderingly; it was queer that Pheny could care so much for a party! But Greg finally agreed with Duff that she was "only a girl, after all, and girls had to be a little foolish now and then."

A tall man, with bowed shoulders and a prematurely whitened head, looked up at her ap-



proach, with a lightening of his heavy countenance. The color sprang into his face and his eyes flashed as he read the note she gave him.

"Pickering! He might have let me alone," he murmured. "Wasn't there any place but this that would do for him?—and now to persecute my poor children!"

"But it—it isn't exactly persecuting people, dear old dad, to ask them to parties," suggested Pheny a little timidly, for it was long since she had seen her father so moved. "And oh, I want so much to go!"

"You want to go!" echoed her father, as if in amazement. "You want to have heart-burnings and jealousies, to be misunderstood, and crowded to the wall, and trampled upon? Ah, well! It's always the way! You will learn only by experience."

"Oh, dear me, dad! I only want to go to Luella Pickering's party. A girls' party! It can't be so dreadful as you say. I've been to them, and they were not," said Pheny stoutly.

"Perhaps I may be a little absurd, Pheny; but I can't let you go—not to the Pickerings', at any rate. Don't let me hear any more of it."

Pheny turned away, and the green fields and the blue sea swam mistily before her eyes. The first pang of disappointment was keen. Her habit of thinking for others came to her relief. How



embittered, how miserable, her father was! She wished that she had not added to his troubles by asking to go to the party. There seemed to be some reason why it would be worse to go to Luella Pickering's party than to any other.

After all, Pheny went. It was Arabella who came to the rescue. Arabella was a born Yankee, who never waived the privilege of freeing her mind.

"If that young one ain't never goin' to have a chance to go amongst folks an' be like other girls, I for one ain't a-goin' to stay here an' see it!" she proclaimed, forcing her way into the little den to which Mr. Jecks retreated when his hard and uncongenial labor was over. "'Tain't accordin' neither to natur' nor grace to forsake the assemblin' of yourselves together; an' the hem took down in her old dotted muslin makes it jest a fit, an' I've got some cherry-colored bonnet ribbons that's providential for a sash, if ever anything was; an' if it ain't my place to speak, see her heart broke I can't an' won't!"

Mr. Jecks would have liked to wave her imperatively out of the room, but Arabella was fully capable of carrying out her threat. It would be impossible to fill her place in the present state of the family finances; all the household burdens would fall upon Pheny's shoulders. And so Arabella's eloquence flowed unchecked; and what "the



dear old dad" had denied to Pheny, although her wistful looks tugged at his heart-strings, he yielded to Arabella.

He opened the door, and called after her sternly, "Remember, this is only for once! I won't have it again."

"I hain't no opinion of such foolishness as goin' to parties," Arabella declared that night to Pheny, who was curled up on the broad window-seat of the living-room, watching for the boys through a dreary fog. "But all the same, if your father says you're to go, that hem's got to be took down."

"He won't let me go, Arabella; it's no matter about the hem," said Pheny mournfully.

"'Tain't an hour ago that he told me, in his own settin'-room, that you was to go. I ain't deaf as I know of," said Arabella tartly.

Pheny had sprung to her feet and uttered a joyful cry, but her face fell the next moment. "He doesn't *want* me to go to the Pickerings', I know, Arabella!"

"He don't want no more talk about it, *that* I know," said Arabella quickly. "Sakes alive! it ain't a-goin' to break no bones for a girl to go to a party, if she hain't got no more sense than to want to! And that hem kind of come down itself, the thread was so old an' rotten; an' bein' I had a hot iron, I jest give it a little might of



pressin' whilst you was out weedin'." Arabella produced a muslin gown, old, but white and dainty by reason of careful laundering, and tastefully bedecked with the "providential" cherry ribbons.

Pheny clasped her hands, and drew a long, long breath of admiration. "It's beautiful! And, O Arabella, you *are* such a dear!" she exclaimed.

"There, don't be a-palaverin' me! I guess I know if I've got young ones to look out for, I've got to be a-slavin'. Here you, Jason, let them flapjacks alone, an' don't go to daubin' your clo'es with maple surrup!" And Arabella pursued Jason. Pheny knew that it was rather to hide the soft looks which belied her words than for any other reason.

An invitation had come for Milt, brought by the Pickerings' little many-buttoned page, who was the admiration of all Sandy Beach. It was evidently an afterthought; in fact, it was Tom's suggestion, which he had been at some pains to make Luella adopt.

Milt's face was like a thundercloud when the invitation was put into his hand, and he forthwith dropped it into the heart of the kitchen fire. Arabella said it "seemed real wasteful to burn up so much hifalutin' and perfumery."

"Wouldn't it be a nice world if people would all like each other?" Pheny remarked to Arabella when the boys had left the room.



“Them that’s top of the heap an’ them that’s clear under ain’t a-goin’ to,” said Arabella philosophically. “Them Pickerings has took airs, an’ there’s something back of it all, if I don’t miss my guess. It’ll all come out one of these days; you see if it don’t.”



## CHAPTER XVII.

### LUELLA PICKERING'S GARDEN PARTY.

DUFF was stirring betimes on the day of the lawn party. In the first place, he took a walk down the beach to the little booth beyond the hotel, where were sold curiosities and ornaments, from lucky bones and sharks' teeth to tiny watches and strings of coral. Duff had been "saving up" for the Fourth of July, — they celebrated so stingily at Sandy Beach, that a boy needed all the more to show his patriotism by making a noise, — but he wasn't going to have Pheny go shabbily dressed to that lawn party.

There was a necklace, with bracelets to match, made of tiny pearly shells and red glass beads, which Duff admired very much. Seventy-five cents! That was a great deal of money. Duff felt a keen pang as he saw fire-crackers and torpedoes vanish out of his reach; but for Pheny to be smart, to be able to hold up her head among the others, it was not too much to give.

Pheny was a little dismayed when he produced his present, which was not until her pretty white



dress was donned, and she was ready for the party. The beads were very vulgar and ugly, taste not being Duff's strong point. But should she hurt Duff's feelings — Duff, whose homely face was radiant with joy and pride? Better that every one should sneer at her, better that she should disgrace Luella Pickering's party, was the feeling of Pheny's loyal heart.

"They're real becomin'," said Arabella, with unwonted affability; and Pheny went gayly off to the party, having "as nice fixings as any of them," as Duff told her.

"Oh, horrors! Luella, look at those red glass things!" whispered Polly Rawson at the first opportunity. "How common they make her look!"

For a moment Luella almost wished that she had not invited Pheny Jecks. What would the girls think? Pheny was not unaware of the meaning of many curious looks, and her cheeks were as red as the beads; but she held her head high, as Duff had advised: she was not going to be ashamed of Duff's present. And there were several girls whom she used to know, well-bred girls, who greeted her as if nothing had happened, and didn't look at the beads; and it was all so delightful, the green, velvety lawn, with the tennis-balls flying, and the music making one's toes tingle, that she soon forgot her mortification. Pheny could have a good time without thinking of herself, and



her gayety and good-nature drew plenty of friends to her side.

“See how much every one is making of her — even the Peyton girls, who are so particular!” said Luella. “And I heard their mother inquiring for her father, and saying he was one of her oldest friends. I think it would have been a mistake not to invite her, whatever papa may say; for people are sure to discover that they are here. And look at Tom! I didn’t suppose I could coax him to be civil to any girl—and he hasn’t been to any of the others; but he has been dancing with Pheny Jecks, and now he is carrying her an ice!”

This was after the Chinese lanterns were lighted, and the great lawn, with its flower-decked trees, was a fairy bower. Pheny had been feeling enchanted for a long time, and actually pinched herself to be sure that she was Pheny Jecks. What could her father have meant by his bitter warning? Every one had been most kind—even Tom, whom her brothers had held in such scorn, and who certainly had a supercilious way of staring at one through his glasses. They had misjudged him very much; he was not snobbish at all, but had shown a great interest in the Jecks boys, especially Milt, inquiring all about his pursuits. Pheny was even guilty of the disloyalty of wishing that her boys had as fine manners as Tom. She chattered away to him almost as freely as to one of



her brothers. Pheny *was* a little simpleton about some things; the boys were quite right about that.

Tom resumed the subject of Milt's pursuits, as soon as he returned with the ice. They were a little withdrawn from the gay crowd, and the music came softly from far away. Pheny remembered afterward, with a keen pang, just how it sounded — a little ripple of "Sweet Home" coming and going upon the breeze between their talk.

"And Milt is determined to be something different from a farmer or a fisherman in spite of his father?" Tom said interrogatively.

"Such a life as that wouldn't do for Milt, you know," said Pheny earnestly. It was a comfort to talk about the boys to some one who understood, and seemed really interested. "He is so ambitious! He works and works at that drawing. Sometimes he draws all night, after he has been working hard all day. I get up in the night, and look for a light in the old tool-house, and it makes me feel badly when I see it; I know he is so tired. He works there because papa never goes there, and it is out of sight of his window. Papa put his old desk out there to get it out of the way, and Milt uses that. It — it's a secret, you know" — Pheny looked up in sudden dismay "But of course you wouldn't tell papa."

"I certainly wouldn't," said Tom lightly, "even



if your father would do me the honor to speak to me, which I very much doubt."

"Papa doesn't speak to any one if he can help it," said Pheny, and returned to her ice with a sigh of relief. Of course it didn't matter who knew that the old tool-house was Milt's studio, so long as his father did not.

"Tom, what did you mean by paying so much attention to Pheny Jecks?" asked Luella, stopping him on his way up-stairs that night.

Tom reddened angrily.

"You wanted me to dance; and if I've got to caper like a monkey, I shall choose my partner," he said. "Does a fellow always mean something by what he does?"

"I didn't mean to find out where that design was," he said to himself reflectively, as he closed the door of his room. "No one could say that I meant to; but I found out, nevertheless!"



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE DESK IN THE TOOL-HOUSE.

IT was on a cloudy morning, nearly a week after the lawn party, that Milt took a party from the hotel out fishing in the *Tramp*. It was the *Tramp's* business to earn an honest penny in any way that she could. Milt worked early and late, and missed no opportunities, hoping always to save enough to pay for a course of drawing-lessons. But it was not always that there was a penny to be spared from the bare necessities of living in the tumble-down old farmhouse, and the drawing-lessons were still in the dim distance.

But in the meantime there was an artist at the hotel who had given him a little help and some useful hints, and there were books on architectural drawing in the Hebron library which he walked five miles to get. Obstacles, in Milt's opinion, were made to be overcome; and he was more and more convinced that he had a good idea in that design.

From his studio under the roof Tom had watched the *Tramp*, through a glass, as she set out from



the pier. "It's an all-day fishing-trip, that's what all those luncheon-baskets mean," he said to himself. "And I got Luella to ask Pheny Jecks to her picnic — a 'small and select;' she needn't have been provoked with me for backing out, for I never really promised to go. And those boys have gone down to the marsh to help make hay. At last the coast is clear. A fellow feels cheap, manœuvring and watching so, but all I want is to see what that fellow is doing with that drawing. It couldn't hurt him, even if he could do anything with the design, which he can't. He's made no end of blunders by this time, of course. And I want to know exactly how he was going to manage those bases."

Tom went stealthily along behind the garden wall, and kept in the shadow of the trees as he crossed the field. "A fellow who isn't used to skulking doesn't like this!" he said to himself; "but it isn't as if I were going to do any harm."

With his hand on the door of the old tool-house he drew back, although the latch yielded, and no one was in sight. Tom had never done dishonorable deeds; the question now was whether he had been preparing to do them, or to resist the temptation.

He could see the light in that window from his room, a faint spark burning steadily until late into the night, as Milt worked. He had arisen in the



night to look at it, as Pheny did. His feverish eagerness to see how the drawing had progressed was uncontrollable.

At least, Tom did not control it. He raised the latch softly, and went in. It was a dusty, cobwebby place, filled with old lumber. There was the desk in a corner, only a little less dusty than the other old furniture. Milt was careful to keep it so, that his father, if he should by any chance go there, need not suspect. Tom shut the door behind him, and slipped the bolt. The desk was locked, but he was prepared for that. He had with him a bunch of keys which fitted a variety of desks and drawers in his father's library. The locks of desks like that were ordinarily of the simplest construction; and if one of the keys would not unlock it, he thought a bit of wire would.

The third key that he tried was successful, much to his relief; for he had a vague feeling that to pick a lock was more disreputable than to open it with a key. The desk seemed to be full of old letters and papers. Tom felt a chill of disappointment; what more likely than that Milt took the design with him to his room to hide it more securely? But he searched among the papers, and came at length upon a rough portfolio of home manufacture. Here it was, among several others, all evidently intended for the same purpose, but none nearly so good—not one; probably Milt



didn't know enough to be aware of that himself. But yet he was working upon it evidently, and had discarded the others.

"How well the fellow is doing — how wonderfully well!" he said. "A little heavy and bungling his touch is, here and there; but how he carries out his idea! *There* I made a mistake. I ought to have carried out my coping as he has done; it was a little out of drawing there, but he is remedying that. He's a genius! And how he works! Heavens, if he should win! That's what the committee is after — real talent!"

Tom took the sketch to the window, to examine it more closely.

"It's in my hands — no one would suspect me! But pshaw! What am I thinking of? He would have time to draw another. And I'm not so bad as that — yet!"

"You jes' leave that be! It's Milt's!"

The words were spoken in a shrill voice that came from somewhere close at hand, and Tom grew hot and cold in actual terror.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## LITTLE JASON'S SECRET.

A HEAP of shavings under the carpenter's bench in the old tool-house gave forth a rustling sound, and from it emerged the rotund person of little Jason. He was clinging tightly to a small pan of doughnuts, and his face was besmeared with the same dainty. It was evident that he had surreptitiously possessed himself of the fruits of his mother's cooking, and sought a safe retreat in which to enjoy them.

It was a relief to Tom, in the first moment, to see anything so purely terrestrial as little Jason ; but in the next he realized that scarcely anything could be more disastrous than this small spy. "I — I'm not hurting Milt's drawing, you know," he stammered, quailing before the round-eyed detective in a calico apron, as before a stern judge. "I draw, too, and I wanted to see how he was getting on ; that's all."

Though he was fat and addicted to doughnuts, little Jason was too shrewd not to see the lameness of this excuse. "Folks that opens other



folks' desks gets took up," he remarked sententiously; and Tom became aware that another line of defence was necessary.

"Perhaps Milt might be annoyed, though. As you can see for yourself, I am putting it into the drawer again, just as it was, and so" —

"What a whole slew of keys! Do you keep 'em a purpose to unlock folks' drawers? Be you a burglar?" little Jason's mouth remained wide open now, as well as his eyes.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked Tom with sudden hope.

"O' course I know; you're the feller that lives over there," with a jerk of his head toward the Pickering cottage; and Tom's hopes were dashed. "You're Tom Pickering. But I didn't know you was a burglar; is that why the boys don't think much of you?"

"Listen to me," said Tom, with desperate calmness. "I'm not a burglar; you must know that a boy like me is never a burglar. I'm — I'm a friend of Milt's."

"Does — does Milt know it?" said little Jason, with an accent of doubt.

"And of his sister's; you can ask her. But no — on the whole, you would better say nothing about me. As I said, Milt might be annoyed, because he doesn't like to have his friends look at his drawings, so I'm willing to pay you to keep quiet



about seeing me here," said Tom. "I shouldn't think you would wish to say much about being here yourself," he added, with a stern glance at the doughnuts. "What will your mother say?"

"They'll be ate before she knows it, anyhow," answered little Jason triumphantly.

"But she'll punish you," said Tom solemnly. The grin which immediately overspread little Jason's face proved a hopeless laxity of maternal discipline, and Tom returned to the one plan that promised to have any effect.

"I will give you this if you will keep silent about seeing me here. Do you think you can remember?" he said impressively, holding up a silver quarter.

"I don't know as I could for a quarter; mebbe I might for a half," said little Jason, not at all eagerly, and with his mouth full of doughnut.

"Are you sure that you could for half a dollar?" asked Tom sternly, but with an anxiety which was perfectly patent to little Jason's keen eyes.

Little Jason clutched the extended half-dollar in a grimy fist, and walked resolutely out at the door. "If I should feel as if I was goin' to forget I'll come over to your house, 'n' you can give me another half-dollar," he called out.

Tom looked after him with a sinking heart. He was entirely at the mercy of this little monster, and his only hope lay in the extent of the



monster's appetite for half-dollars and his own ability to furnish them. Oh! why had he been so careless? Why had he not searched every nook and cranny of that dusty old den before he opened the desk? It would have been better still to keep away from Milt's studio altogether.

Pheny had had what she called "a beautiful time" at the picnic. Luella Pickering was more and more friendly; she treated her almost as if that dreadful change in her father's fortunes had never come. Whether this was partly because the girls whom Luella regarded most highly welcomed her so heartily, Pheny did not question; she had not a suspicious mind. Her father had seemed less averse to her going, since she had so heartily assured him after the lawn party that his predictions about "heart-burnings" had not been fulfilled.

Pheny was radiant that night; it seemed almost as if the old times were coming back. If only the boys would have gone! Luella had actually invited them all, there being a scarcity of boys, who are even more necessary at a picnic than at a lawn party; but Greg had jeered openly at such "girl fandangoes," and Duff would not be persuaded, although he had gone to Pigeon Hill, through a brush thicket that was almost impenetrable, and got a great quantity of mountain laurel, which grew only there, to adorn the hay-



carts that Luella had secured as a picturesque means of conveyance. Luella had admitted to Pheny, in a burst of grateful candor, that Tom would not have done as much; adding, with a sigh, that boys were hard to manage, and she didn't know what to make of the way in which Tom was behaving. In fact, Tom had been really ill-natured about the picnic; and Polly Rawson — that little thing — had suggested imperfections in his bringing-up.



## CHAPTER XX.

## THE LIGHT IN THE TOOL-HOUSE.

MILT was dejected that night, Pheny found, to the sudden lessening of her own spirits. He had had a hard day in the *Tramp*. The people who had hired it would stay longer than was prudent ; the wind had fallen, and they had been obliged to row home. He was too tired to have any spirit for his work ; but the light would appear in the tool-house for all that, Pheny was sure. He had to work away at the simplest elements, poor Milt ! His lack of training made it necessary to do in three months the work of a year or more, if there was to be any chance of his winning that prize.

Pheny had brought home a box of caramels from the picnic, and three had fallen to little Jason's share. The young epicure found them to be of a far superior flavor to anything afforded by the little peanut shanty on the beach, and resolved to become the possessor of the remnant which Pheny, with a prudent mind, had reserved for another time.



He beckoned Pheny mysteriously out upon the moonlighted back porch. "I've got an orfle secret," he said, with an assumption of breathless eagerness. "You'd orter know it ; a feller hired me not to tell. Look-a-here !" and little Jason produced the shining half-dollar. "But I'm a-goin' to tell, because I'd orter — for them caramels !"

"O little Jason ! I'm afraid you're a very bad boy," said Pheny severely, believing that little Jason had drawn upon his imagination for this plan to secure the caramels. "Where did you get that money ?"

"Ain't I a-tellin' you that a feller give it to me for not tellin' what he was doin' to Milt's drawrin', unlockin' his desk in the tool-house with a whole slew of keys and a wire ; and if it hadn't been for me he'd have stealed it or tored it up ? I was under the bench ; and 'twas that feller with the glasses that the boys don't think much of — and there ! I've been and told you, and you ain't given me the caramels, and he won't give me no more half-dollars !" Little Jason realized that in his greed for caramels his ordinary shrewdness had failed him, and he began to whimper.

"Do stop, little Jason ! You shall have the caramels if you want them," said Pheny, hastily bringing them out. "But you mustn't tell such stories. I can't think what you mean. Tom Pickering would not open Milt's desk !" But though



she spoke in an assured tone, Pheny's heart beat wildly with doubt and fear. It was she who had revealed to Tom Pickering the secret of Milt's studio. The design was only half completed, Milt worked so slowly upon it ; but if anything should happen to it he might never have the courage to begin again. " You mustn't tell things, anyway, when you've promised not to," said Pheny, trying not to lose sight of her duty toward little Jason's morals, even in her distress.

" I ain't a-goin' to no more," said little Jason, munching a caramel with much satisfaction. " I'm goin' to make him pay me another half-dollar."

Pheny resolved that she would at some later time endeavor to make little Jason see the evil of his ways ; now she could think of nothing but this strange story about Tom Pickering, and try to decide what course she should take. It would not do to warn Milt, he was so hot-headed and resentful ; and he was already bitter against Tom Pickering on account of what he called his supercilious airs. He had been angry because Tom had merely seen his design and spoken of it. Of course Tom had been moved only by curiosity, if he had done what little Jason accused him of ; and yet Luella had told her how ambitious he was, how determined to succeed in whatever he undertook, and that he was at work upon some drawing which absorbed him and made him " cross." She did



not know that it was for a prize ; but Tom was uncommunicative, even more so than Milt.

That was it ! Pheny saw it in a flash. And she had given him the opportunity to take this advantage of Milt. He, with his unlimited opportunities, had wished to ruin poor Milt who had none, and she had shown him how !

She felt a strong impulse to denounce Tom Pickering to his face, to tell him how base and cruel he was ; but she had not enough proof. Little Jason's reputation for truthfulness was but poor. She must watch the tool-house while Milt's drawings were there ; it must never be possible for Tom to go in there again ! Although she racked her brains, Pheny could not think of any better plan than this. She might advise Milt to put a lock on the door ; but Milt, who had such a way of going to the bottom of things, would not rest until he discovered what she meant. He might, indeed, understand at once, for he was probably conscious of the rivalry which she had never suspected.

Milt worked that night in spite of his fatigue ; and Pheny, crouching in her window, propped open her sleepy eyes, and watched until the light should vanish. She could not depend upon hearing Milt come in, for he crept softly lest his father should hear. When the light had disappeared, she waited long enough for him to have



reached his room, and then slipped softly out to the tool-house. She had been used to open that old desk without a key; if one shook the lid from side to side it would open at a certain point. She tried at first in vain; she would stay there all night, so she thought. It was dark and lonely, but she would protect Milt's precious design! But, fortunately, with a few more efforts, the old desk did open; and Pheny slipped the portfolio out, and ran with it to her room. There was no difficulty about replacing it, for Milt never had time to go there in the morning. But he stayed there so late at night! Pheny was used to going early to bed. At ten o'clock she had to begin to unravel all the puzzles she could find, to keep herself awake. At eleven, the multiplication table said backward scarcely prevented her from dropping off to sleep. She would have asked Duff to help her; but Duff would have "pitched into" Tom, to use his own phrase, without loss of time.

Fortunately for Pheny, now that the haying was over, Milt had more time in the day, and worked less often at night. But one week in July he worked three nights in succession; and on the third Pheny, quite worn out with watching, fell asleep at her window. She awoke with a start as her little clock struck twelve; the light in the tool-house was out! How long the design had been in danger she could not tell. She ran down



hastily, feeling guilty that she had slumbered on guard. The lock was more stubborn in yielding than usual; it was the more difficult to open it that one must be careful not to make a sound. Another noise mingled with her careful pushing, a rustling of shavings, a footfall, soft but distinct.

Pheny could not repress a little cry as she turned her head, and saw, only a few feet behind her, a figure all in white.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## LUELLA PICKERING'S SUSPICION.

IT was an unspeakable relief to Pheny Jecks when the moonlight fell upon the figure behind her, and showed her who it was.

"Luella Pickering!" she cried in amazement. "What is the matter? What are you doing here?"

But Luella answered not a word. She was in her nightgown, with only a light white shawl thrown over her shoulders; and her face looked so white and set in the moonlight that Pheny felt a cold chill of terror.

"Oh, say something, Luella! Won't you answer me?" cried Pheny piteously. Her first thrill of angry suspicion that Luella had come there, like Tom, to spy upon or injure Milt, had changed to fright at the girl's strange aspect.

Luella stretched out her hands as if in search of something, and Pheny caught them in hers. A sudden flash of recollection had given her the clew to Luella's mysterious appearance. She had heard, when they were little girls together at school,



that Luella walked in her sleep. Seizing her hands, Pheny shook her roughly; she had read somewhere that vigorous means were necessary to awaken sleep-walkers.

Luella came to herself with a little shuddering cry. "Oh, where am I? How came I here? Is it you, Pheny Jecks?" She was trembling violently now, and Pheny tried to soothe her.

"You're quite safe; I'll go home with you," said she. "It's only across the field, and see how bright the moonlight is! We sha'n't think of being afraid."

Inwardly Pheny was quaking: her midnight excursions had always tried her nerves, and now she had been so startled, and Luella seemed so strange; but for Luella's sake she must be brave!

"I know where I am now," said Luella quietly. "I am in the tool-house where the old desk is. I walked in my sleep, and I came here because—because it worried me; something worried me. That is the way that I always do. I go where there are things that worry me."

Pheny held her breath in sharp expectation. Did Luella know? Was she going to speak of what Tom had done?

"I haven't done it often lately," Luella continued; "only once before in a year. I frightened Madame Bassecour, my French governess, so that she left. I believe if Polly Rawson had seen me



she would have gone into fits. How in the world came you here?" she added, as if struck by a sudden thought. "It must be the middle of the night!"

"I — I came to take care of something," answered Pheny.

"How brave you are! And yet in some ways you seem a rather timid little thing," said Luella reflectively.

"It was for one of the boys," said Pheny simply, as if that fact explained any amount of courage. She wondered whether Luella understood what it was that she was taking care of.

If Luella did, she made no sign. She leaned a little upon Pheny, as they crossed the field; the moonlight made everything as clear as day, but Luella shivered in the chilly wind, and complained that the rough ground hurt her feet.

"I didn't think that you would have to go back alone," she added. "Sha'n't I call Tom up to go with you? I don't want to rouse one of the servants. I don't want them to know about me, but Tom knows."

"Oh, no, no! I don't want him; I'm not afraid — I mean I'm used to being out at night!" said Pheny quickly.

"Why do you dislike Tom so much?" asked Luella curiously rather than resentfully, though there was a trace of the latter feeling in her tone.



"He seemed at first to get on with you better than he usually does with girls; but now, lately, you can't bear him!"

"I — I'm not used to any boys but my own brothers," stammered Pheny. Clearly Luella did not know about Tom, or she would not have asked her that question. But what did she mean about the old desk and her worry? Pheny was too worn out to think to-night. She put Milt's portfolio under her pillow and slept upon it, but only to dream that the *Tramp* had turned into a dragon, with brass-clawed feet, like the old desk, and that Tom Pickering, astride it, was riding Milt down. As for Luella, she had crept shivering to bed, but could not sleep at all. She was like Tom in one respect; when an idea had taken possession of her mind she dwelt upon it constantly. To-night she felt half angry with herself that it was so.

"I ought not to let things worry me; papa said I mustn't," she said to herself fretfully. "I almost wish that Tom hadn't told me. Why can't I be easy about it, and say that it isn't my affair, as he does? But it would be so dreadful if it should be true! They've had such a hard time — to be poor and friendless, to have all one's world changed so suddenly, must be dreadful. I wish I dared tell papa what I think. Something, I scarcely know what, makes me believe that he suspects it.



Would he suspect a wrong like that and not try to right it? Perhaps he would say, like Tom, that it wasn't his affair. And he would call me a little girl! I'm not a little girl any more. I must — I will find out, whether it is true!"

At last, when the dawn was gray on her window-panes, Luella slept heavily, and even in dreams made no more excursions to the old desk in the tool-house.



## CHAPTER XXII.

UNCLE DICK AND MR. JECKS.

TOM PICKERING'S mind had been in a disturbed state ever since he parted from little Jason. It was absurd that one should be in terror of a pygmy like him ; but there seemed to be no way to crush him, or to close his irresponsible little mouth unless he chose to do it himself. It was astonishing, Tom feared it was ominous, that he had not appeared to demand more half-dollars. He had seen him (keeping himself at a prudent distance) haunting the little confectionery shanty on the beach, and he hoped that he was merely indulging in a peanut debauch, which would content him until his money was spent ; but there was the dreadful possibility that he demanded no further price for silence because he had told.

If so, those rough Jacks boys might be expected at any time to offer him physical violence. Tom said to himself that they were brutal enough for that ; but he was no coward physically, and it was not this that he feared so much as the disgrace of having people know that he had been guilty of



a base action. To have his own family know it seemed worst of all. He had very soon begun to cast about in his mind for some way of explaining the matter to Luella before she should hear little Jason's version. He hit upon a plan which seemed to him remarkably clever and not so very dishonest.

"I've got a queer notion into my head, Luella," he said, following her out to the hammock in her favorite nook of the piazza. "I've wanted to talk to you about it before, but that girl is always around." Polly Rawson had gone to visit some friends at the hotel, and given Tom an opportunity which he had really been waiting for.

Luella opened her eyes wide. It was very seldom that Tom wished to talk about anything with her, especially of late.

"You know that Uncle Dick and Mr. Jecks used to be great friends. They were in college together, and after Jecks was married Uncle Dick lived in his family."

"I think I have heard. I had forgotten," said Luella.

"I'll tell you what reminded me of it. There's an old desk out in their tool-house that I think was Uncle Dick's. I saw letters and papers in it with his name on them. I wandered in there one day; the maid-of-all-work's small son was in there—a regular imp he is, by the way. The



place is filled with old lumber ; of course I didn't think there was any harm in examining it." Tom didn't mention the key ; Luella might never hear of it. "The first thing I saw was Uncle Dick's name, and that brought something to my mind like a flash. I didn't think much about it at first, but it's been haunting me ever since." This might have been true if something else had not haunted Tom with much greater persistency. "I wonder if you remember, as I do, what we heard Aunt Margaret say when she was so ill, just before she died. It was three years ago ; and we were a pair of youngsters, quarrelling in the nursery because I had scalped one of your old dolls. You pretended that you still cared for them, though you didn't. Aunt Margaret cried out, so that you could hear her a mile away, 'It isn't Milton Jecks who is guilty. It is Dick, and we must save him, we must save him !'"

Luella grew pale. "I remember it, Tom ! I remember it !" she cried. "I thought it was dreadful, but I didn't think it meant anything. They said she was wandering. You don't think — O Tom, you don't think" —

"Uncle Dick went away just after that, you know, away off to South Africa, and he has never come back ; and Milton Jecks was arrested for forgery. I suppose, of course, that it was a fancy that Aunt Margaret got into her head because she



was ill ; but it isn't to be wondered at that when I saw that old desk I was curious to know what was in it."

"But you do think that she was delirious, don't you, Tom?" asked Luella eagerly. "You don't think that what she said could possibly be true?"

Tom looked a little alarmed. He had not meant that Luella should take this so seriously. His moral sensibilities were not naturally very acute, and his selfishness had blunted them. That there were people who followed duty as an aim, rather than success, he was aware ; but he had a vague idea that they were somewhat namby-pamby people, who were content to eat their pudding without any plums, and come in at the fag-end in the race of life. Luella's shocked face startled him a little.

"You mustn't say anything to anybody, you know," he said earnestly. "You might make an endless lot of mischief. And then there might not be anything in it ; there probably isn't. But you see it was natural that I should want to look into that old desk when I knew, the first moment I saw it, that it was Uncle Dick's."

But it was not the fact that he had looked into the old desk which impressed Luella. "It is too dreadful that any one should have suffered like that unjustly!" she said ; "and how can it ever be set right now?"



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## BRIGHT HOPES.

IT was a terrible suspicion that had taken possession of Luella Pickering's mind. She tried hard to fight it down. "I can't believe," she told Tom, "that if Uncle Dick could have done a wicked thing like that he would ever have allowed another to bear the consequences!"

"Oh, no! it isn't at all likely. When I think of it I see that it isn't," said Tom comfortably. "But I did get a little worked up about it at first. And that's why" —

"But Uncle Dick was very ill when he first went away; he had brain-fever, and papa thought he would die. Dr. Corbin, who went with him, would have tried to keep him from knowing things that would distress him. Tom, don't you think it may be that it was so, and Uncle Dick has never known?"

"A fellow can't very well commit forgery without knowing it!" said Tom jocularly.

"I mean may not have known that another person — his friend too — was suffering in his stead," Luella explained.



"Oh, now you're making too much fuss about it, Luella!" Tom impatiently replied. "It was too long ago for me to think anything about it. And it isn't any of our business, anyway. I ought to have known better than to say anything about it to a girl; you're about as bad as Polly Rawson and that foolish little Pheny Jecks!"

"I only wish I were as good as Pheny Jecks," said Luella stoutly. "And even Polly was never so proud and hateful as I. I felt so much above the Jeckses, and now — O Tom! what if this should be true?"

"Why shouldn't you feel above them? I'm sure I do," said Tom easily, "in spite of the fact that their muscle is better developed than mine. I saw Milt thrashing a young lobsterman half as large again as he was the other day!"

"Why did he thrash him?" asked Luella.

"Oh! they're born fighters, or at least they must have learned in their cradles to strike out straight from the shoulder," Tom answered, as he sauntered away. But he turned back, feeling a little twinge of conscience. It was foolish, as well as mean, to be unjust when one had nothing to gain by it! "I believe the lobsterman *was* abusing a dog or a cat," he said.

It was on the third night after this conversation that Luella walked in her sleep to the tool-house. Pheny returned Milt's portfolio to the old desk,



with a greater feeling of insecurity than ever before. She aroused her courage almost to the point of advising Milt to keep his drawings elsewhere, but the dread of a quarrel still prevented her. Poor Pheny! She was destined to wish afterward, with bitter regret, that she had warned Milt, at any cost.

The summer days slipped by at Sandy Beach, and all anxieties lay beneath the surface. Even Milt's brow grew clearer, to Pheny's great delight. This was because the *Tramp* had been reaping a rich harvest, by reason of the great number of visitors at the hotel. He had been able to pay for regular lessons from the artist who was staying at the hotel, and had saved money besides.

His voice trembled when, on a late August evening, he talked to Pheny of his good fortune, sitting on the railing of the porch, with the moon-rays lighting up his eager face.

"Mr. Robson says I have real talent, marmee! I showed him my design yesterday" —

"Oh! is it finished?" asked Pheny anxiously.

"Almost. I've made half a dozen copies, but always keeping to the same idea which struck me at first. I knew it was good! Robson was surprised at its originality," Milt went on. "A fellow couldn't boast so to every one, but that's the comfort of having a marmee!" he added lightly. "It must be sent in next week. I'm going to make



a desperate effort at the finishing touches. Of course I don't really expect the prize, you know, but I may win some recognition ; it may be an opening for me."

"O Milt, you ought to have the prize ! You have worked so hard," said Pheny, with deepest sympathy.

"And I've been thinking, marmee, that I've been pretty crabbed and cross. Perhaps I've been too bitter against those people over there." Milt pointed toward the Pickering cottage. "That girl has been pretty good to you."

Pheny nodded emphatically. "I've had beautiful times ; but they would have been better if you boys would have gone too."

"We're a lot of unlicked cubs, but we may be a credit to you yet, marmee ; who knows ? But what I was going to say was about that candy-pull in the great kitchen."

"Oh ! how did you know ?" cried Pheny, flushing quickly. "I never really expected to have it. Luella said how nice it would be ; she hasn't been in very good spirits lately, and I think she is tired of entertaining so much. I did say to Arabella that I wished I could have it while the Craigie girls are visiting Luella" —

"And Arabella said to father that you ought to have it. He gave in at once, too, and I can provide the funds for my share." There was a little



ring of pride in Milt's tone. "Now, don't fret about taking it; molasses and peanuts don't cost much!"

Pheny flew at him, and almost strangled him with a hug. "And you boys won't go skulking off? People hardly know that I have any boys at all!" she said.

Milt's face fell a little. "I'm not much of a fellow for fandangoes, you know. I shall be apt to disgrace you, but I'll do my best," he replied.

To Pheny things seemed almost too good to be true, — Milt's bright prospects, and her candy-pull! The girls had admired that great kitchen, into which they had once had a peep. The house was nearly two hundred years old, and its great beams were so low that one could almost touch them. There was a huge fireplace, with a crane, in one end of the kitchen; and the candy was to be made in the great kettle that hung upon the crane. Luella said it would be "unique."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE FATE OF MILT'S DESIGN.

SO the candy-pull was given. The Jecks boys behaved "like lambs," as Pheny gratefully declared. Even Greg, from whom rebellion was expected, collected birch bark for the invitations; and Duff displayed great skill and enthusiasm in decorating the kitchen with green boughs.

One little cloud marred Pheny's pleasure. Tom came, although she had strongly hoped that he wouldn't. By this time she was trying to think that little Jason had been the victim of a bad dream, although he stuck to his story pertinaciously. As for Luella, she could scarcely have known what she was saying, aroused so suddenly from her sleep-walking. Pheny still kept diligent guard over Milt's portfolio of drawings, but her fears were gradually disappearing.

Tom had had serious doubts about the desirability of meeting little Jason, who was sure to be on hand at a candy-pull; but his fears, like Pheny's, were gradually disappearing. It seemed probable that little Jason's greed had been satiated by the



half-dollar, or possibly the affair had slipped out of his small memory. And Tom still had a feverish desire to know what Milt was doing. In the few encounters he had had with him of late, he seemed so softened and civilized, as Tom said to himself, that it might not be impossible to obtain the information from Milt himself. So Tom defied the power of his small persecutor, and went to the candy-pull.

He was quite safe for the time, for little Jason's whole soul was absorbed in the prospect of unlimited peanut candy. Moreover, he had a wholesome fear of Pheny, whose morals he knew to be oppressively strict. It was this fear, and not forgetfulness, that had deterred him from further demands upon his victim; but little Jason was only biding his time.

The candy-pull was the greatest of successes. Pheny, having no false pride to distress her with the poverty of her surroundings, was so genuinely merry that she made all her guests so. The boys persevered in their lamb-like behavior, although Greg privately confided to Duff that he felt himself likely to utter a war-whoop at any minute. It disturbed Pheny somewhat that, toward the close of the evening, Milt and Tom Pickering wandered out of the house together, and remained a long time. They were apparently on good terms; but although Milt was behaving so beautifully, she



said to herself that it would be easy for Tom Pickering to "rub him the wrong way." And there was always the suspicion in her mind that Tom wished to take an unfair advantage of him.

She thought she heard their voices out upon the north porch. Her father had come out of his den, and was walking in that direction also. He looked very much disturbed; probably the noise had annoyed him, although his room was remote from the kitchen, and she had stuffed all keyholes and crannies with cotton. Milt was talking rapidly. He was evidently in one of his rare confidential moods. Happiness and hope had opened his heart. Pheny felt a thrill of sympathy; but it was dangerous to make a confidant of Tom Pickering! And if his father should hear! But he was turning back at the sound of voices when Tom's voice, sounding strained and shrill, cut the silence, —

"And so you *really* mean to try for the Tremaine prize?"

Pheny immediately called the two boys into the house, giving as a reason that the festivities were culminating in a country dance, in which everyone was expected to join. She was anxious lest her father had heard Tom's shrill exclamation; but this seemed a slight danger compared to that to which Milt was exposed by Tom's unscrupulous rivalry. She knew, now, that he also was trying



for the prize. She wished she had warned Milt not to be so confidential; but perhaps, after all, it was better to have friendly relations between the boys. She could protect the design for the little time that remained before the examination; and perhaps she was too nervous, and had misjudged Tom.

So Pheny tried to shake off her fears, and foot it as gayly as any down the long room, between the rows of merry boys and girls, to the music of the ancient violin, which Greg, perched upon the old buffet in the corner, was playing with more vigor than skill, but to the ardent satisfaction of every one.

Milt danced, which was the greatest of wonders, for he had an unspeakable scorn of such "antics." He was in greater spirits to-night than Pheny had ever seen him.

"Such a delightful affair as it was!" said Minna Cushing, who was the great social authority, as they trooped off; and Selina Craigie said "the scene was so picturesque that she wished it could have been photographed." It was small wonder that Pheny, whose love of society was as natural as her breath, should have her head a little turned! She slipped out to get the portfolio as soon as the house was quiet, without looking for the light; she did not think it possible that Milt would work to-night. But he was there; nothing would turn



Milt from his purpose! She stole softly back again, and curled herself up in her broad window-seat, to wait as usual until the light was out. It was after eleven now; surely Milt would not work long. She was not obliged to resort to the ordinary devices of rhymes and arithmetical problems to keep awake to-night; her brain was so full of exciting happenings that there was not the slightest danger of her falling asleep, she thought.

She kept her eyes on the light; and it began to dance along before her, through green fields, over a treacherous bog in which she had hard work to keep her footing, through long, long, *endless* rows of a country dance! And then, suddenly, it changed to a brilliant burst of sunlight; and Pheny sprang to her feet with a cry, the morning sun shining full in her face.

Now, when her vigils were so nearly ended, she had let sleep overcome her!

It was much later than she usually awoke; the family were at breakfast, and the air was full of cheerful morning sounds. Pheny took heart a little as she hurriedly dressed. It was not likely that anything had happened to the precious design. She was too much inclined to take counsel of her fears; Arabella often said so.

She flew around the corner of the house, out of sight of the breakfast-room, and so out to the tool-house. The old desk was partially open, held so



by Milt's portfolio, from which many of the papers had dropped upon the floor. Torn into a dozen pieces, and scattered among the shavings and saw-dust, was the almost completed plan of a library—the Tremaine prize design!



## CHAPTER XXV.

## VANISHED HOPES.

PHENY picked up the pieces of the torn design, and matched them together in a kind of numb apathy. It was too dreadful to be true! It could *not* be true, she thought.

She heard approaching steps and voices, — Milt's voice, with a doubtful accent, and little Jason's shrill pipe.

"Yes, sir-ee, he was here, an' you'd better b'lieve it! An' the other time he had your draw-rin' in his hand, and he'd 'a' tored it all to pieces if it hadn't been for me! And this mornin' mammy seed him, an' it wasn't morn'n three o'clock; an', says she, 'What's that Pickering feller skulkin' along by the stone wall for, this time o'night?' I knew in a minute that he'd been after your drawrin'!"

Milt stood in the doorway by this time, and saw Pheny with her hands full of the fragments of the design.

"You'd better b'lieve it!" piped little Jason, in shrill repetition; and to Pheny his voice sounded far away, like something heard in a dream. "See



now! He *has* tored it jest because I wasn't here! An' I told her when he was here before, if he did give me half a dollar not to tell!"

"He told you? You knew what that skulking thief was trying to do, and you didn't tell me?" cried Milt, snatching the fragments from Pheny's hands, his face so dreadful in its white wrath that she turned her eyes away from it.

"O Milt, I was afraid to tell! You are dreadful when you are angry! And I have watched and watched every night. I have taken the design into the house as soon as you left it; only last night — oh! I don't see how it happened — I fell asleep!"

"You have taken it into the house? You have kept awake every night all summer to do that?" repeated Milt, half incredulously. "A girl's way! An idiotic way! Why couldn't you have told me that it wasn't safe here from that cur?"

"There was the chance that little Jason might be mistaken," pleaded Pheny. "And O Milt, I was afraid of what might happen! I was afraid you would fight!"

"He shall answer for it! Don't you doubt that!" declared Milt. "I may forgive *you* — some time" — Milt drew a long, hard breath — "because you are only a girl." (It was as if he meant, "you are only a simpleton!") "But *he* shall answer for it."



There was a grim determination in Milt's tone that filled Pheny with unspeakable foreboding.

"Milt, you — you wouldn't strike him? That is so wicked, so brutal!"

"What else is there to do to a brute like him? Perhaps you think I would better go and tell him I sha'n't speak to him any more," said Milt, in a mimicking falsetto. "Or ask him if he won't please not do so again, so that we can kiss and make up!"

It was useless to try to influence Milt while he was in this white heat of rage. But another argument suddenly occurred to Pheny.

"Milt, we haven't any proof that he did it," she said earnestly. "If Arabella did see him, which may be a mistake, he might have had some other reason for being out early in the morning. And wouldn't he have been more likely to carry the design off slyly" —

Milt had stooped to the floor, and picked up under the desk a knife with a curiously carved handle, on one end a turbaned negro's head, which, turned another way, became a many-petaled rose. The thin, curved blade was open. It was Tom Pickering's knife; he had displayed it the night before, boasting of its sharpness as he cut candy with it. Milt held it up silently before Pheny's eyes, his boy face looking suddenly old with the rage and scorn that marred it.



"You'll make him give me another half-dollar 'cause I didn't tell for so long; won't you, Milt? An' you'll give me one, too, for — for tellin' you; won't you, Milt?" little Jason's strident voice went on insisting, sounding to Pheny so strangely like something heard in a nightmare.

"He shall answer for it!" repeated Milt, this time with a kind of dogged determination, which was even worse, Pheny thought, than his violent passion. She tried to hold him back as he went out.

"O Milt, such dreadful things are done when people are angry! And you boys were always so quick and passionate — and not having any mother either! And the dear old dad couldn't look after you much, things have been so terrible for him; sometimes I'm afraid, Milt, that his mind is giving way. How could he bear it if — if you were to do anything dreadful? You ought not to mind it so much, Milt — you, who are so clever! You will do great things yet, though you have had this little disappointment."

"Little disappointment!" echoed Milt with flashing eyes. (That was not a happily chosen word, as Pheny felt as soon as it was uttered.) "If you knew what it was to put your whole heart and soul into anything, to try to make up for the lack of years of training in a few months, to work for weeks on a few lines, to struggle with



discouragement, to be so tired that you were stupid, and yet never to give in! To know that a fellow, a dozen fellows probably, with every advantage, were pushing on ahead of you, and then, at last, to have some one who knew tell you that your idea was original, was like an inspiration, it was so good, and that there was a chance of success — and then to find this! Would you call it a little disappointment?" There was a dry sob in Milt's throat. Pheny welcomed it, in the midst of her heartache, as a sign of softening.

"And I was so idiotic with hope as to gabble to that treacherous sneak about it! And you — you knew what he was about, and you let him go on!"

Pheny threw her arms around him, but he shook her off roughly.

"I suppose you did as well as you knew — but keep away from me now. I have something to attend to." And off rushed Milt, with his white, set face that scarcely looked like Milt's.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## IN PURSUIT.

PHENY ran breathlessly in search of help, she scarcely knew where. Milt must be prevented from meeting Tom while his anger was so hot.

She found Greg upon the southern slope of the orchard, turning his largest melon into the sun.

"O Greg! you must follow Milt," she panted, "and keep him from finding Tom Pickering. Something has happened, and there will be a dreadful quarrel. Milt is almost beside himself with anger."

"That fellow! What has he been up to? If it's anything mean, I hope Milt will thrash him. It's just what he needs," said Greg calmly, taking great pains to have the unripe side of his melon exposed to the sun's rays.

"But this is *serious*, Greg! He has destroyed Milt's prize design! It was almost finished, and he has torn it to pieces!" cried Pheny.

Greg's honest, ugly face actually grew pale under its sunburn and freckles as Pheny rapidly re-



lated the story of Tom's tampering with the old desk.

"I don't know how Milt can bear it," he said in a voice that shook.

"But he isn't bearing it," cried Pheny despairingly. "I'm afraid he will do something dreadful. If it were you or Duff — you bluster and bluster, and it doesn't amount to much," she added with sisterly frankness; "but Milt is — is different. Greg, I'm afraid he will *kill* Tom Pickering."

"You always were a 'fraid cat," said Greg. "You ought to know Milt better than that," he added gravely.

"He isn't Milt now; he is all swallowed up in his rage," said Pheny.

"Well, his rage will have time to cool before he finds Tom Pickering," replied Greg after a moment's reflection. "He came over and hired the *Tramp* of me just now. I knew Milt wasn't going to use her. Tom said he wanted to go over to Folly Island to work — draw, I suppose he meant; he said there was such a lot of chattering girls in his house that he couldn't get a minute's peace."

"You won't tell Milt, Greg?" asked Pheny eagerly. "Don't let him know where the *Tramp* has gone. But I'm afraid he will find out, and row over to Folly Island."

"Duff has gone off in his rowboat, and I let



old Shoemaker have the other, and I don't really think he could get to Folly Island in the scow ; he'll have a chance to work off his temper if he tries."

Pheny sat down on the great melon, and drew a long, sobbing breath of relief, while Greg went off to the threshing-machine in obedience to his father's call.

"There's a good stiff breeze blowing ; isn't there, Greg? The *Tramp* will be out of sight before Milt gets to the shore!" Pheny called after him hopefully.

But Milt had already reached the shore, and his keen eye had discovered the *Tramp*. Milt could recognize his catboat when she was scarcely more than a white speck between the sea and the sky. Old Jacob Shoemaker, who had found it too windy for fishing, was just rowing up to the pier.

"You hadn't ought to let your boat to that four-eyed Pickering feller to go out in alone," he said to Milt, as soon as he came within hailing distance. "'Specially when the wind is kind of flawy, as 'tis this mornin'. He thinks he can sail a boat as slick as a tree-toad can hop ; but he don't know no better than to be pretty resky. He said he was a-goin to Folly Island ; an' there he was sprawled out in the bottom of the boat, with the sheet fastened, an' not a stitch took in ! He'll find Folly Island quicker'n he's a-thinkin' to, if I don't miss my guess."



"Let him upset ; who cares ?" muttered Milt. "But he shall answer to me for what he has done first !" he added fiercely, pushing off the rowboat that the old man had left, and leaping into it.

"Something has gone consid'able acrost his grain," remarked old Jacob Shoemaker to himself, as he saw Milt, regardless of the rising waves, pull rapidly out from the shore in pursuit of the distant catboat.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## ON FOLLY ISLAND.

FROM the highest knoll in the orchard, Pheny saw Milt set out in his rowboat. She knew that he was following Tom Pickering to Folly Island, and she was wild with anxiety. She ran toward the shore, frantically calling Milt's name, although he was far out of hearing. Oh! was there no one to help, no way to stop Milt, or soften his anger before he met Tom Pickering?

Milt was finding it slow and hard rowing, in a wind that was tossing the waves into whitecaps, and beating him back as with a mighty hand—the hand of Providence, Pheny might have thought. His wrath was having plenty of time to cool, as Greg had prophesied that it would if he tried the scow; but nevertheless it still burned hotly.

He took a straight course to Folly Island, while Tom was forced to tack. "I'll be there to welcome him!" he said to himself grimly. When he drew his boat up on the beach of Folly Island the *Tramp* was not far off. He landed on the opposite side of the island from that which Tom



was evidently trying to make. "If he sees me he probably won't come here," he said to himself, feeling that it would be more than he could endure to miss the opportunity of facing the traitor then and there.

"He can bring her in on this tack if he knows enough," he said to himself, watching eagerly from behind a rock, as the *Tramp* was beaten and buffeted by the wind, the flapping of her sails coming to his ears above all the noise of the waves. "He ought to know enough to reef, but I think the *Tramp* will weather it." Through Milt's intense absorption ran a half-conscious pride in the sturdy little *Tramp*.

But the boat was brought into her homeward tack with too sharp a turn; the wind struck her what the fishermen about Sandy Beach called "a clean smack."

"She's bottom upward!" gasped Milt. It had happened so suddenly that he felt as if he were dreaming. "He's gone down; he must be under her," he said to himself calmly. A certain exultant feeling came next. His vengeance had not been needed; a swifter and more terrible retribution had overtaken his enemy! A certain vague disappointment mingled with his triumph. "I shall never tell him now that I knew him for just what he was!"

Suddenly a dark object appeared upon the sur-



face, a few rods from the overturned boat, and a despairing cry for help came to Milt's ears. He thought afterward that he should never cease to hear that cry. But he stood as motionless as the gray old boulder upon which he leaned; although he could feel the blood rushing to his head, and his heart beating like a trip-hammer.

"He will come up three times," he said aloud and distinctly, with a vague astonishment at the sound of his own voice. "Just three times, for I am sure he cannot swim a stroke, and then" —

The spell that held Milt broke suddenly; no one can say how or why. It may have been Pheny who exorcised it, — Pheny, pacing up and down the shore, saying over and over her pitiful little prayer that her boys might be kept from fighting. Milt started as if he were springing away from himself, with a shuddering horror. Down over the rocks he went to the place where he had left his boat. He had tied the rope around a stone; but the force of wind and wave had pulled it off, and the boat was dipping up and down upon the waves so far away that it looked a tiny speck.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## MILT SPEAKS HIS MIND.

MILT could swim but slowly in that sea ; it was doubtful whether he could reach the spot where Tom had gone down. Another revulsion of feeling came over him as he plunged into the waves — to lose his life, perhaps, for that sneak ?

It was lost again in the nobler feeling and in “the joy of the battle” to the strong swimmer. He shouted encouragingly\* in response to another agonized cry for help ; it was a feebler cry, and he knew that when another came it would be the last. That fellow hadn’t really lost his senses when he seized him — as he went down for the last time. He obeyed Milt’s sharp command to keep his arms to himself, and not grasp him around the neck ; he even murmured huskily, “Throw me off if you feel yourself sinking. I’m not worth saving, anyway !”

Milt could hardly believe that he heard aright. He had a vague feeling that the awfulness of the struggle, the ringing in his ears, the sense of



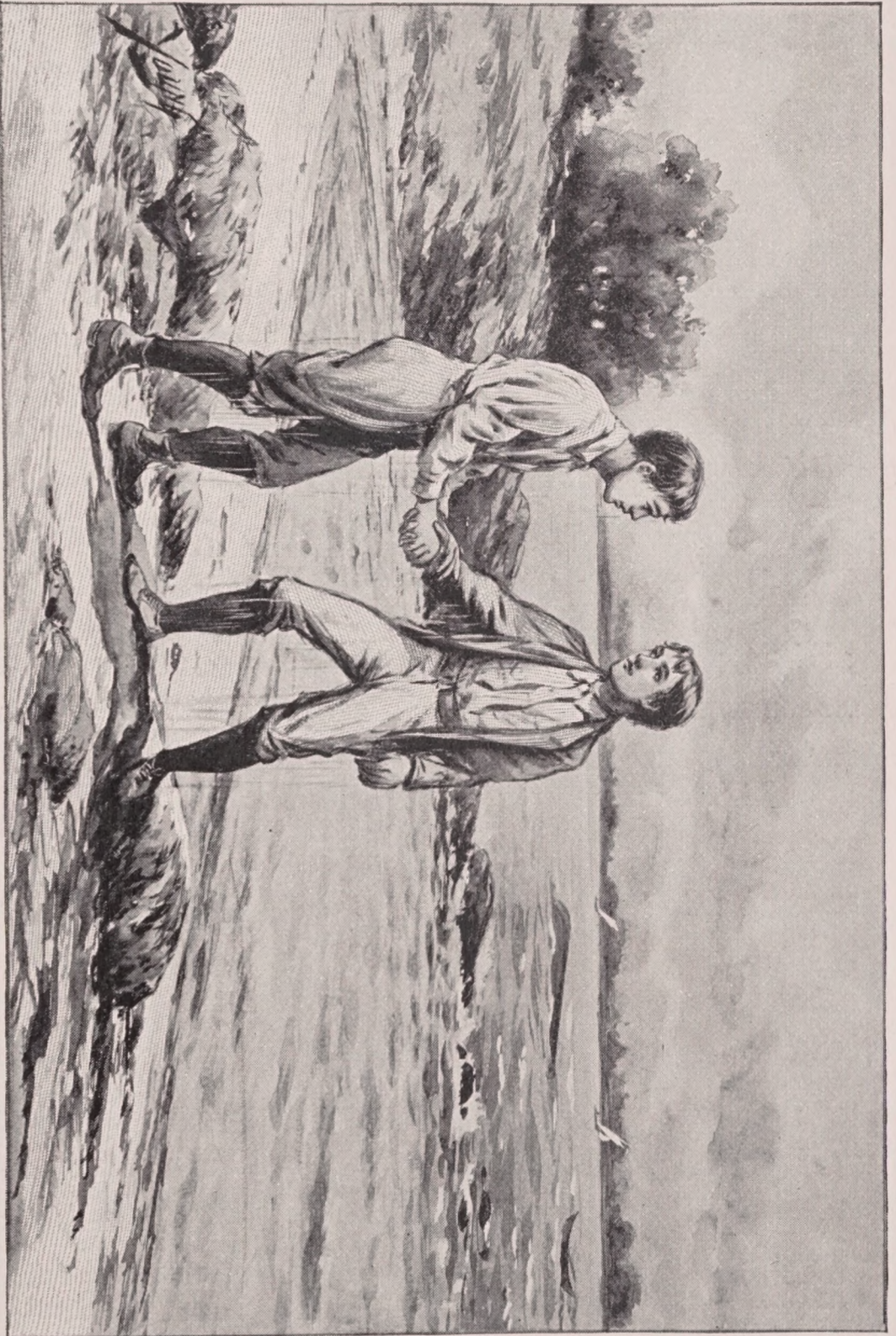
suffocation, had turned his brain ; this was something that he was reading in a book, something that a hero said. That miserable thief would cling to life whoever might lose it for him ! One more of those dreadful struggles, and then it was the solid ground beneath them both ; but it was Milt who gave out then, who slipped down into a merciful gulf of oblivion, and the other fellow was working over him, rubbing him, trying to breathe the breath of life into him. When he came to himself, Milt wrenched himself out of his grasp fiercely.

“Look here ! I don’t want any of that,” he murmured huskily. “I don’t want you helping *me* ! I know what you’ve been up to ! I know who it was that sneaked into the old tool-house after my prize design. I know you’ve been sneaking ’round trying to steal my idea for weeks ! I didn’t come over here to keep you from drowning, I can tell you ; I came to have it out with you, and your getting a ducking isn’t going to hinder me, either !”

Milt stood upright on the rock to which Tom had dragged him ; the color rushed to his pale face, and he clinched his fist and looked a threatening, though a still somewhat limp and dripping, figure ; and the other boy shrank visibly.

“I came over here to have it out with myself,” he said. “You can’t say anything harder to me











than what I think of myself! — and what a fellow thinks of himself, when he gets his eyes wide open, is a good deal harder to bear than what anybody can say to him. The other fellow may be mistaken — he's apt to get a little off the track, and so gives you a chance to stand up for yourself; but you — you can't help knowing just how it is with you inside."

Tom's voice trembled. Milt's clinched fist dropped, and he looked at him curiously.

"I'm not so mean altogether, you know," pursued Tom. "I have to push down something better in me to be so; but — I'm ambitious and — and your idea was better than mine, a great deal better. And I said to myself that you wouldn't know how to use it, from lack of training. You have the talent, you know, but I've had the chance; things work so queerly in this world!"

"So — so you thought you had a right to steal it!" cried Milt with ringing scorn.

"I persuaded myself that I had," returned the other calmly. "I went into that old tool-house and looked at it."

"*Looked* at it!" echoed Milt in wrath and scorn.

"I didn't mean to *copy*, you know," the other went on, quietly ignoring the interruption; "but gradually it got to be too much like yours. I came over here with my drawing yesterday. I have



to go off by myself to settle some things. I tucked it away in a crevice of that great rock over there. I couldn't quite bring myself to tear it to pieces ; but to-day I came over to do it."

He darted away, and came back in a moment with his design. Milt had a glimpse of what seemed to him a kind of glorified copy of his own drawing ; the next instant it was torn into bits before his eyes.

He put out a restraining hand.

"I don't know what good that does, now mine is gone too !" he said hoarsely. "If you could only have left mine ! I would rather have taken the risk, like a man. I know how you improved upon it ; but you had your weak points. You took away the strength and simplicity ; mine may have been crude, but it was strong. If you only hadn't torn it up !"

A boyish, bitter sob tore its way from Milt's bursting heart ; "or if you'd only done it before," he added, "so I might have had time to draw another."

"I tear your drawing ?" cried Tom. "I never did that, never ! It may not be much worse than what I did, but at least I'm not guilty of that ! I had it in my hands, but I put it safely back just where you left it. Of course you have a right to believe anything of me, but *that* I never did !"



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## BACK TO THE SHORE.

THERE was an expression of sincerity on Tom's face that forced Milt to believe him.

"I never harmed your drawing," he repeated. "I was tempted when I saw it — thank God it was only for a minute! I don't think I am so bad as that," he added reflectively; "though I have been finding out some rather unpleasant things about myself. It is destroyed, you say? And there isn't time to draw another! That's mighty rough on you! And you thought, you really thought, that I did it, and yet you risked your life to save mine!"

Milt turned his face away. "A — a fellow has to be decent," he said gruffly. "And I came near enough to letting you drown — so near! I — I believe you didn't do it, though it's very mysterious; and I'm *glad* you didn't do it," added Milt.

"If — if you wouldn't mind shaking hands with a fellow who never will be a skulking thief again" — Tom began hesitatingly. And Milt gave his hand a hearty, boyish grip.



It was a relief that it was necessary to return to practical affairs, especially to Milt, who had an inordinate dislike to "making a girl" of himself.

They were wet, and the wind was chilly, and they waved and whistled frantically at a little puffing porgy-boat which passed near the island; but her own tremendous whistle drowned theirs, and she was too intent upon business to notice the waving handkerchiefs. It was a fishing-smack which had discovered the overturned *Tramp* that took them off at last, and fortunately picked up Milt's rowboat, so that the boys had the exercise of rowing home.

Milt's mind was divided between the mystery that surrounded the destruction of his drawing and the new phase of Tom's character which made him difficult to understand.

"It was fine, that design of yours," he said reflectively; "it was a pity to destroy it." It seemed to be easier to talk freely from the fact that, as they rowed, their faces were invisible to each other.

"You mustn't build your house on another man's land, you know," replied Tom, in a tone which was gruff with his effort to conceal his emotion. "It seems too much to bear that you should lose yours. Do you know, I think it is fine of you to believe me! I should hardly think



you would," he added. "It looks as if I might be mean enough to lie."

"You would have to go back to Folly Island to have it out with yourself by this time if you had," said Milt, almost jocularly. Nothing but a joke would relieve the unendurably strong tension of feeling. "It must have been little Jason — that imp, as you call him," he added. But even as he spoke, another suspicion flashed into Milt's mind. "I think that my father may have done it," he said after a pause, with some difficulty. "He has — has had a great deal of trouble, and it has embittered him. He wants to keep us out of the world, at any cost. He has been very anxious about my ambition to be something different from a farmer or a fisherman. Of course I never told him about my drawing, but he may have discovered it."

"One's own father! Well, I should think that would be pretty rough!" said Tom sympathetically.

"He is so much to be pitied," answered Milt, with a bit of a break in his voice. "He has been wronged, cruelly wronged," he added, in his sturdy faith which had never questioned his father's innocence, or asked for proof.

A sudden recollection came into Tom's mind of the suspicion which he had confided to Luella in the early summer. Perhaps Mr. Jecks *had* been



cruelly wronged, and by Tom's own uncle. He had almost forgotten about it: he had persuaded himself that it was no affair of his, as he had said to Luella; and although she had made such a fuss about it, she had never mentioned it since. He almost thought now that Luella ought to have done something about it. Was it to be left to him? Must one do such hard things as that? It was wonderful how the idea of duty — to be decent, as Milt put it, with his boyish shamefacedness — altered all one's point of view.



## CHAPTER XXX.

## PHENY AND HER FATHER.

IN the meantime Pheny, watching from the shore, had seen Milt steering directly toward Folly Island; and, although she was too far away to see the accident to the *Tramp*, she had seen that the catboat did not return from her last outward tack.

“Tom may be going to Farwell’s Point instead of Folly Island,” she said to herself.

She felt that she must get some one to go and persuade Milt to come back. No one but his father could do that. If he would only go! The Meacham boys had just come in with their sailboat, and they would let him take that. She flew back to the house, reproaching herself that she had wasted so much time. She had hesitated to appeal to her father, because it involved the telling of Milt’s secret. But of what consequence was his secret in the face of such a danger as this? There was no secret, now that his design was destroyed! So Pheny said to herself as she rushed into the barn, where the thresher whirled with



a cheerful noise, and Greg toiled like a boy who meant some day to own a great ranch.

Pheny poured her tale breathlessly into her father's ears, while he leaned against the machine and listened, not sharing her excitement, but looking older and more weary than she had ever seen him.

"You *must* go, for you know Milt's temper; and who can wonder that he is angry, when he worked and worked no matter how tired he was, night after night"—ah, well Pheny remembered those night watches!—"and never having any leisure or fun that other boys have, and every cent that he could save went for lessons, and he mended up his old shoes himself—and oh, it's hard for a boy to struggle like that! And then to find the design torn in pieces—all his work lost, the hope that meant so much all gone! Would you blame him if he were furious against the one who did it? O father, come, come! I don't know what he will do to Tom Pickering!"

What a worn look, what a gray pallor, there was on her father's face, and how still he stood and listened, while her quivering, excited voice ran on!

"But Tom Pickering didn't destroy the design; it was I," he said quietly at last.

"You?" gasped Pheny. "O father, you *couldn't* have done it! It was Milt's life."

"Then, I did it none too soon. I have saved



him from the torture of disappointment, or from the ruin of success," said her father calmly, although his face showed that he was repressing strong emotion.

"I guess he couldn't have had much worse torture than he has had this morning!" said Greg, with a touch of resentment.

"But he'll have to fight his way, father, and have disappointment and success! You have to, even here in Sandy Beach," cried Pheny. "It must be that we were meant to have them — and bear them. And people are not so bad. I didn't have heart-burnings; I had good times! Arabella says you have good times if you carry them with you, and you always can, you know; and see how good the girls were to me!"

"H'm — *good!* Pigs couldn't have helped being," growled Greg, under his breath.

"If you did it — oh, I don't see how you could! — if you did it, you surely ought to try to hinder him from fighting Tom Pickering!" cried Pheny, not to be turned from her purpose.

"I don't think you need to be anxious. He is quick-tempered; but I trust him — I trust my boy Milt." For the first time her father's voice showed signs of the emotion with which he was struggling. It *had* cost him something to destroy Milt's design.

A flying figure came down the orchard slope. It



was Luella Pickering — Luella, quite roused from her usual languid grace. Nothing could have happened so soon, and yet Pheny's heart beat fast with fear.

Luella paused, breathless, in the barn-door; she held a letter tightly clasped in both hands, as if it were a precious thing.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

## A LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

LUELLA stood in the doorway of the barn without speaking for a moment. Then she said hesitatingly, "I wanted to find your father too ; but I — I was afraid." And Mr. Jecks smiled grimly, and a little sadly, as if it were not altogether pleasant to know that the young people were afraid of him.

"I don't know how to tell it!" she went on, stammering, her face growing red and white by turns. "Long ago, early in the summer, Tom remembered something. It was the old desk in your tool-house that made him think of it. He said it used to be Uncle Dick's desk."

Pheny was startled by the whiteness of her father's face. He raised his hand, as if to stop Luella ; but the girl went on in a firm voice, —

"You *must* listen. You mustn't think we were meddling. Oh, I'm sure you won't ! You see, Uncle Dick belonged to me ; I loved him best of anybody when I was little, and I couldn't bear to think that he had done so dreadful a



thing as to let some one else suffer for his wrongdoing."

Mr. Jecks was gazing at her now in a kind of haggard, distressful wonder. It astonished Pheny that she dared to go on.

"What Tom remembered was, that we had once heard Aunt Margaret cry out that Uncle Dick, and not some one else who had been suspected, was guilty. We didn't know what it meant then; but this summer Tom thought what it might be, and a good many things made me believe that what he thought was true. Uncle Dick went away off to South Africa; they said it was for his health, but he has never come back. I could believe that he had done some wicked thing, — I knew people said that he was wild and reckless, — but not that he was wicked enough to let some one else bear the consequences. Such mean wickedness couldn't be in Uncle Dick. I wrote to him about it. I thought the answer would never come, and yet it has been a shorter time than usual. Sometimes it takes three months. He never knew — Uncle Dick never knew! It is just scrawled, he was so excited. He had brain-fever; and when he got well they told him that his stepfather had paid the money, and the matter was all hushed up. And because he was ashamed to come back, and there was a business opening there, he stayed on. And he says he has tried to hear as little



as possible from home, for fear of opening old wounds, but that no disgrace could cause him such suffering as to know that the best friend he ever had has suffered in his stead. And he says that that friend had no right to do it." Luella paused, either because she felt that she had reached a climax, or because she was out of breath.

"No right? No; for my children's sake I *had* no right. I have felt that since it was too late," murmured Milton Jecks, rather to himself than to the young people who were looking at him with wondering, sympathetic eyes.

"O dear old dad, we haven't minded so very much—it was worst for you!" cried Pheny, throwing her arms around his neck.

"It was hard to prove my innocence, and it made me desperate that he should be willing to throw the guilt upon me," Mr. Jecks said. "And once, when we were very young, he saved my life. I couldn't forget that. But it was weak; for my children's sake I should have resisted."

"Uncle Dick's coming home! It will be all right now. I knew he was not like that!" cried Luella, with a proud ring in her voice. "Papa walked the floor when I told him. He is proud, you know. But he didn't scold me, as Tom said he would if I wrote. Papa is honest and true—a true gentleman. He said he was glad, and



that he blamed himself bitterly — bitterly ; that was exactly what he said. No, it wasn't good of me to write, Pheny ; I couldn't help it. I couldn't bear to think that Uncle Dick was like that ! ”



## CHAPTER XXXII.

## NEW HOPES.

DR PICKERING'S tall figure loomed above his daughter's head in the barn doorway.

"The youngsters seem to be having things their own way this summer," he said, with an effort at ease which his voice did not carry out. And then he approached the other man, who looked as if he neither saw nor heard. "I had nothing but a suspicion — and he was my only brother. If you could give me your hand, Jecks," he said. "Believe me, I shall not count the cost of anything that will set things right."

There was only a slight hesitation, and then the two men's hands met in a firm clasp. There were no words said, but Pheny's keen and loving eyes saw that her father's face was transformed. He stood straighter, also, as if a burden had fallen from him. He would be "a man again among men," as Milt had hoped.

But oh, poor Milt! The recollection brought Pheny a sharp pang. She would not say anything of her fears to Dr. Pickering and Luella: it seemed



disloyal to expose Milt's infirmity; but as soon as they had gone she persuaded her father to go with her to the beach. The Meacham boys' boat might be there still. Her father's face had changed painfully at the mention of Milt; he was blaming himself deeply, she knew. It was hard that Milt's disappointment should mar this great happiness.

"Couldn't he draw another in time, Pheny?" he said, with almost pitiful eagerness. "I thought it was for the best; but I see now that I was wrong — all wrong."

"There are only three days before the examination, and it takes Milt so long because of his lack of training. He said that a skilful artist could easily enough, but for him it would be impossible. But don't feel so distressed, father! This good news may make him forget all about it," said Pheny, trying to be consoling, although only she knew how deeply rooted were Milt's hopes.

"So much for your fears!" cried her father suddenly.

Two boys were coming up from the shore, and one had his arm over the other's shoulder in most friendly fashion.

"Pinch me, dear old dad, for I think I'm dreaming!" cried Pheny, as she recognized Milt and Tom Pickering.



They separated, and Milt came hurriedly toward them. "Tom got upset in the *Tramp*. We're going to recover her. Where's Greg?" he said.

Pheny took in his wet and dishevelled condition at a glance. "He would have drowned if you hadn't saved him!" she cried. "It was just like you, Milt. And, O Milt! he didn't do it."

A sharp spasm of pain crossed Milt's strong young face as he looked at his father.

"I was mistaken. I was wrong. Forgive me, Milt," said the older man.

"Never mind, father. I shall do better next time," said Milt, making an evident effort to speak cheerfully. "But you'll never make a farmer of me, you know."

Pheny poured out the great news of how Luella Pickering had come to the rescue.

"You don't think I can feel badly for anything now, dad?" cried Milt radiantly.

"Ah, but if I hadn't dashed your hopes, my boy!" said his father regretfully.

Arabella was calling little Jason from the back door with a disturbed and angry face.

"That young one acts like all possessed!" she exclaimed. "He's stickin' to that tool-house, an' won't come out for his victuals nor nothin', because he says he's got something hid away there that folks has got to give him half a dollar for. It's hard when you can't keep folks from sp'ilin'



your own young one. That pore innercent wasn't all ate up with greed for half-dollars till folks put it into his head!"

"What is it that he has, Arabella?" asked Milt, a flush rising to his forehead.

"Oh, land! I guess it ain't no great," said little Jason's mother impatiently. "As near as I could find out, it's a drawrin' of yourn that he's got done up in a newspaper." Milt rushed off to the tool-house. Pheny followed him, thrilling with a vague hope which something in her brother's face had inspired.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## TOM'S OPINION OF THINGS.

"I DON'T know why I didn't think," gasped Milt as he ran to the tool-house. "I thought it was Tom Pickering at first, and of course he would know the right one. I slipped it into a newspaper; it was the first thing in the desk. Father may have got the one that he destroyed out of the portfolio — the last copy, you know."

Little Jason, ensconced with grim determination under the carpenter's bench, was summarily dispossessed of his treasure. Milt held it up before Pheny's eyes, with a long, long breath, which would have been a sob if Milt had not scorned to be "girly," — the precious design which now, in less than an hour, should be on its way to the prize competition.

"It's too good to be true! I didn't know that things ever did happen so in this world," cried Pheny. That was after they had all talked over the great good fortune together in the living-room.

But from without came prolonged howls — little



Jason's, increased by the application of the exasperated maternal hand. Pheny ran to the rescue.

"The little beggar is only getting his deserts," said Greg philosophically.

"But I can't bear it to-day. What if we all got our deserts?" said Pheny.

"That's it. What if we all did?" echoed Milt, nodding gravely, and thinking of the moment when he had heard what he thought was Tom Pickering's last cry for help.

That competitive examination took nearly a month. Tom carried the news to his Aunt Esther and Luella as they sat upon the piazza on a soft September afternoon. Milt had just parted from him, and they had caught a glimpse of his beaming face.

"He has won the prize, Tom. I saw it in his face!" cried Luella.

"No he hasn't. It was Everard Fales, who was brought up in an architect's office, who won it. But what do you think? The committee saw such evidences of talent in Milt's design, that they persuaded Captain Tremaine to give him the scholarship too; and afterward, if he deserves it, the captain will send him abroad. He has everything but the glory, and that he didn't seem to care a snap about. He's a queer fellow," added Tom meditatively, "but I think the finest fellow I ever saw."



"I'm sorry they're going up to town before us," remarked Luella; "but Mr. Jecks has a promising business opening. And we shall all be here again next summer, I hope. Mr. Jecks wouldn't part with the old farm for anything, though he doesn't expect to bring his sons up there. It seems strange that things should have turned out so beautifully when I began by being so horrid. It was just because Pheny Jecks was so good and sweet."

"And Milt such a noble fellow," amended Tom.

"And perhaps there was a little leaven of goodness elsewhere," suggested Aunt Esther.

So the world wags, its mass of sin and misery leavened constantly by sweetness and self-sacrifice. And Arabella and Pheny expect that some day even little Jason may reform.

As for Tom Pickering, he goes on his way toward manhood better equipped for facing the world because of his experiences with Macurdy Green, with Minty Round,—though she was only a girl,—and with Milton Jecks,—especially with Milton Jecks. He has confided to Luella that in getting acquainted with them he first made the acquaintance of Tom Pickering; and, as every one knows, it is a great thing for a boy to get acquainted with himself, and to understand, so far as any of us may, the good and the evil, the strength and the weakness, of his own nature.



So, whether he is an editor with Macurdy Green, or a famous architect, — already there is a plan formed for a partnership between him and Milton Jecks, — he means, first and foremost, to be above any mean or dishonorable act, — “lord of himself whate’er befall.”

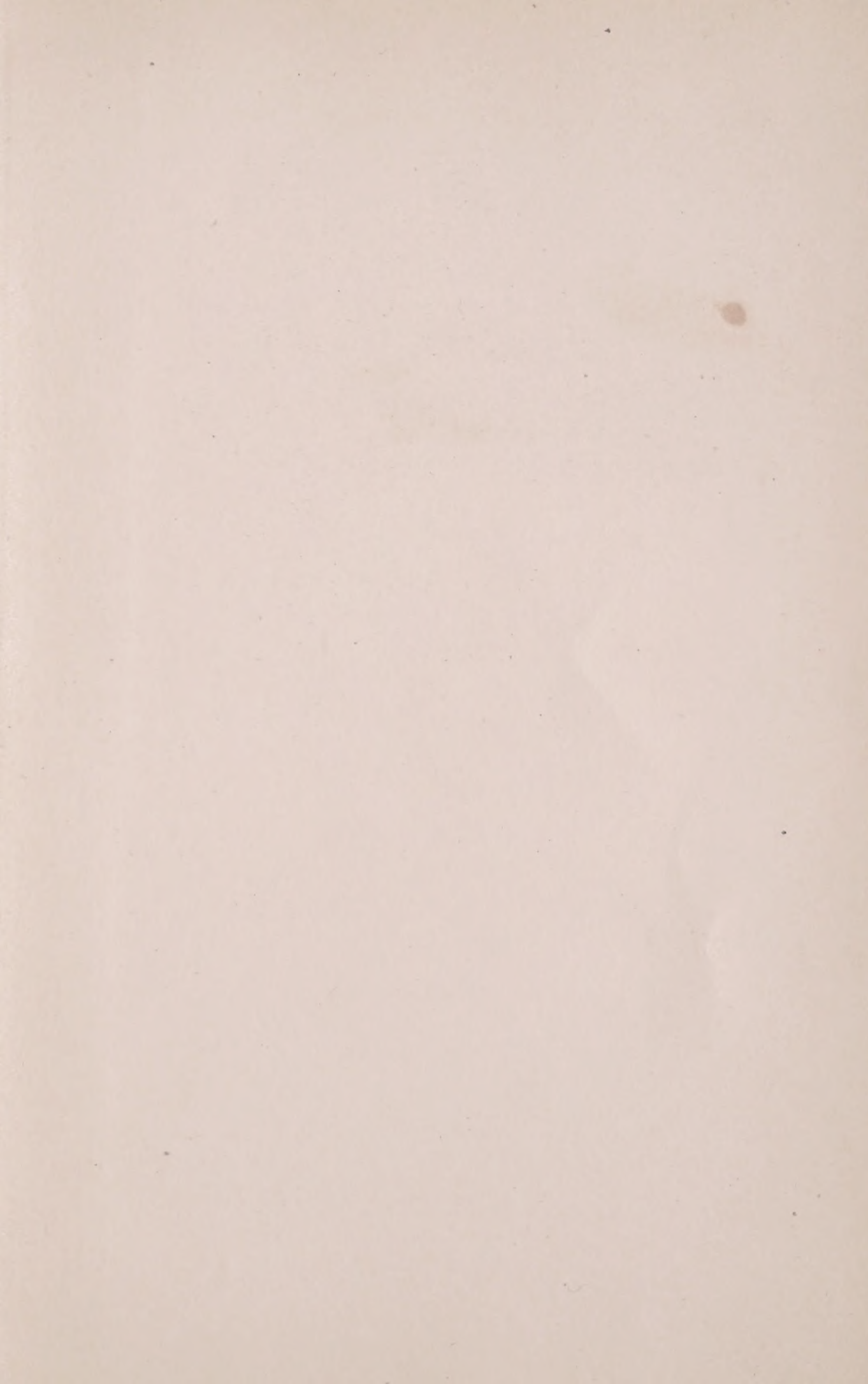






























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